

CRIME AND PUBLIC DISORDER IN COLONIAL BENGAL

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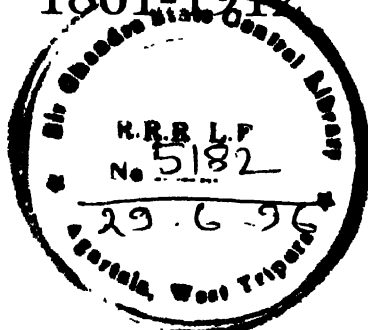
CALCUTTA

ARUN MUKHERJEE

**CRIME AND PUBLIC DISORDER
IN COLONIAL BENGAL
1861-1912**

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Arun Mukherjee

K P BAGCHI & COMPANY
CALCUTTA

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Contents

| | Page No. |
|--|----------|
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> | vii |
| <i>Abbreviations</i> | ix |
| <i>List of Tables, Charts, Diagrams and Maps</i> | xi |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| PART-I (CRIME AND CRIMINALS) | |
| 2. Crime in Bengal : general trends and regional variations (1864-1912) | 15 |
| 3. The Bengal crime scene : some special features | 38 |
| 4. Socio-economic offences | 58 |
| 5. Bengal criminals | 80 |
| PART-II (PUBLIC DISORDER) | |
| 6. Communal disorders | 106 |
| 7. Industrial workers' unrest | 137 |
| 8. Political terrorism : a new dimension in public order problems (1905-1912) | 170 |
| 9. Conclusions | 205 |
| <i>Appendices</i> | |
| I Divisions and districts of Bengal proper, showing area and population (1881 and 1911) | 235 |
| II Total cognisable crime (TC) and six major crimes (rioting, murder, dacoity, robbery, burglary and theft) in Bengal and its five divisions (1864-1912) | 236 |
| III Total cognisable crime (TC), property offences (DRBT) and price of common rice (RP) in Midnapore district (1864-1904) | 245 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| IV. Socio-economic background and modus operandi of some habitual criminal groups operating in Bengal (1861-1912) | 247 |
| V. Inmates of Bengal jails distributed by caste and religion (1911) | 262 |
| VI. Major incidents of communal disorder in Bengal (1891-1912) | 264 |
| VII. Major reported incidents of unrest among industrial workers in Bengal (1862-1912) | 272 |
| VIII. Forms of protest action by industrial workers in Bengal (1861-1912) | 280 |
| IX. Incidents of political crimes in Bengal (1906-1912) | 282 |
| X. Vows administered to recruits in the secret political groups/samitis in Bengal (1906-1912) | 288 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 293 |
| <i>Index</i> | 313 |

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'PALASH'

Arun Mukherjee

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| BAAR | Bengal Annual Administration Report |
| BPAAR | Bengal Police Annual Administration Report, including Eastern Bengal & Assam Police Annual Administration Report (EBPAAR). |
| CID | Criminal Investigation department (of the Bengal Police) |
| COB | Census of Bengal |
| Confdl. | Confidential |
| COI | Census of India |
| CP | Commissioner of Police |
| CS | Chief Secretary |
| Cr.P.C. | Criminal Procedure Code (of India) |
| Desp. | Despatch |
| DIG | Deputy Inspector-General of Police |
| DM | District Magistrate |
| EB & A | Eastern Bengal & Assam |
| FRT | Final Report True (submitted to court by police after investigation, when accused persons cannot be charge-sheeted for trial due to lack of adequate evidence.) |
| GG | Governor-General |
| GOB | Government of Bengal |
| GOI | Government of India |
| HC | Head Constable |

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|------------------|--|
| HS | Home Secretary |
| IB | Intelligence Branch (of the Bengal Police) |
| IGP | Inspector-General of Police |
| IJMA | Indian Jute Mills Association |
| IPC | Indian Penal Code |
| JM | Jute Mill |
| Judl. | Judicial |
| LPB | Lower Provinces of Bengal |
| Lt.Gov. | Lieutenant Governor |
| OSD | Officer on Special Duty |
| Poll. | Political |
| Progs. | Proceedings (of the Govt. of Bengal or the Govt. of India as the case may be) |
| Pub. | Public |
| Res. | Resolution (of the Govt. of Bengal or the Govt. of India as the case may be) |
| R.I./r.i. | Rigorous imprisonment |
| RNNB | Report on the Native Newspapers of Bengal |
| SAB | (W.W. Hunter's) Statistical Account of Bengal |
| SCR | (Rowlatt) Sedition Committee Report, 1918 |
| S.I. | Sub-Inspector of Police |
| s.i. | simple imprisonment |
| SP | (District) Superintendent of Police |
| S/S | Secretary of State for India |
| TC | Total (cognisable) Crime |
| WBSA | West Bengal State Archives |

List of Tables, Charts, Diagrams and Maps

TABLES

| | | |
|------|--|----|
| 2.1 | Total cognisable crime (thousand) : Bengal and divisions, 1864-1912 (selected years) | 16 |
| 2.2 | Mean price of common rice in Bengal (selected years) | 18 |
| 2.3 | Unweighted index numbers for wholesale prices : India and Bengal (1903-1912) | 20 |
| 2.4 | Dacca division : Burglary and Theft cases(B+T) : 1901-1912 | 21 |
| 2.5 | Variations in total cognisable crime (TC) : Bengal and divisions, 1870-1912 | 22 |
| 2.6 | Population (in lakhs) and TC per one lakh (1,00,000) population : Bengal and divisions (1872-1911) | 23 |
| 2.7 | TC-population, TC-police and police-population ratios in selected provinces of British India (1890 and 1900) | 26 |
| 2.8 | Selected major crimes as % of TC : Bengal and divisions : 1865-1912 (selected years) | 28 |
| 2.9 | Major crimes (RtMDRBT), violent crimes (RtMDR) and crimes against property (DRBT) per one lakh population : Bengal and divisions (1872-1911/12 : Census years) | 30 |
| 2.10 | Population per policeman : Bengal and divisions (1872-1911) | 34 |
| 3.1 | Murder : annual average of cases (selected districts) | 38 |
| 3.2 | Dacoity : annual average of cases in selected districts (1847-1912) | 41 |

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 3.3 | Growth of communications and industries in Bengal (1890-1912) | 45 |
| 3.4 | Immigrants into selected Bengal districts : 1891 | 46 |
| 3.5 | TC, RtMDR and DRBT per lakh population : selected Bengal districts (1881,1891 and 1899) | 48 |
| 3.6 | Average price of foodgrains and incidence of property offences in Balasore District (Orissa) : 1863-1865 and 1866 | 51 |
| 3.7 | Comparative figures of the price of common rice (seers per rupee) and property crimes (dacoity, burglary and theft) in selected districts : 1866-1867 | 52 |
| 4.1 | Number of cases in which women were found guilty of infanticide between 1876 and 1881 | 63 |
| 4.2 | Incidence of economic offences in the Lower Provinces of Bengal : 1870-1912(selected years) | 71 |
| 5.1 | Important indigenous criminal groups operating in Bengal : 1861-1915 | 86 |
| 5.2 | Important exogenous criminal groups operating in Bengal : 1861-1915 | 90 |
| 5.3 | Male and female convicts in Bengal jails as % of Bengal population | 96 |
| 5.4 | Convicts in Bengal jails distributed by age-groups | 97 |
| 5.5 | Convicts in Bengal jails distributed by religion | 97 |
| 5.6 | Marital status of female convicts in Bengal jails | 98 |
| 5.7 | Occupations of convicts admitted in jails of Bengal proper | 99 |
| 5.8 | Convicts by principal religious groups, castes/sects in Bengal (L P B) jails : 1874 | 101 |
| 6.1 | Monthly wage rates of agricultural labourers in selected districts | 122 |
| 7.1 | Growth of urban population in Bengal (1872-1911) | 141 |
| 7.2 | Growth rate (%) of average industrial town in Bengal vis-a-vis average country town in Bengal (1872-1911) | 141 |

(xiii)

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 7.3 | Strength and composition of the industrial workforce in 3 industrial districts of Bengal (1897) | 142 |
| 7.4 | Growth rate of industrial workers in some mill towns of 24-Parganas district (1901-1911) | 142 |
| 7.5 | Sex ratio (no. of females per thousand males) in Bengal : 1872-1911 (census years) | 143 |
| 7.6 | Major incidents of religion-based labour unrest in Bengal : 1890-1912 | 145 |
| 7.7 | Quinquennial average index numbers of prices of common rice and wheat | 148 |
| 7.8 | % increase in looms and labour force in Bengal Jute industry (1885-1901) | 148 |
| 7.9 | Protest actions by industrial workers in Bengal : 1961-1912 | 151 |
| 7.10 | No. of establishment and size of workforce in jute, cotton and coalmining industries in Bengal (1872-1910) | 153 |
| 7.11 | average number of workers in textile and coalmining units in Bengal (selected years) | 156 |
| 7.12 | Religion and caste composition of workers in Bengal coalmines : 1911 | 158 |
| 7.13 | Bengal jute mill workers distributed by major religious and caste groups : 1911 | 159 |
| 8.1 | Incidence of political violence in Bengal (1906-1912) : No. of crimes/Intensity Value | 176 |
| 8.2 | Age-group of persons convicted in Bengal of political crimes or killed in the commission of such crimes (1907-1917) | 187 |
| 8.3 | Persons convicted in Bengal of political crimes or killed in the commission of such crimes distributed by caste and religion (1907-17) | 187 |
| 8.4 | Persons convicted in Bengal of political crimes or killed in the commission of such crimes distributed by profession/occupation (1907-17) | 188 |

CHARTS

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 2.1A | Total cognisable crime (TC) in Bengal (1864-1904) | 17 |
| 2.1B | Total cognisable crime (TC) : Five Bengal divisions (1864-1904) | 19 |
| 2.6A | TC per one lakh population : Bengal & divisions (1872-1901 : census years) | 24 |
| 2.9A | Selected major crimes (RtMDRBT) per lakh population : Bengal & divisions (1872-1901 : Census years) | 32 |
| 2.9B | Property offences and violent crimes per lakh population : Bengal & divisions (1872-1901) : census years) | 33 |
| 2.9C | Property offences and violent crimes : Bengal (1872-1901 : census years) | 35 |
| 3A | Total cognisable crime (TC), property offences (DRBT) and price of common rice (RP) in Midnapore District (1864-1904) | 49 |
| 8.1A | Intensity curves of political crimes in Bengal (1906-1912) | 177 |

DIAGRAM

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| From P and R to SC : a chain reaction | 226 |
|---------------------------------------|-----|

MAPS

| | |
|--|------------------|
| Map of the Lower Provinces of Bengal (Bengal, Bihar & Orissa) | 3 |
| Map of Bengal : showing Division boundaries and Districts with District Headquarters | 4 |
| Map showing the native places of the Mallahs and the areas of their depredations in Bengal & Assam (1861 - 1904) | (facing page) 44 |
| Sketch map showing the location of jute mills in Bengal along the banks of the river Hooghly (1880-1920) | 140 |

1 Introduction

There is now an impressive array of contributions illuminating the socio-economic history of modern Bengal. Looking at this extensive repository of knowledge, one is nevertheless conscious of at least two fundamental aspects of Bengali life, especially in the countryside, which merit a more serious concern. In the first place, sociologists in recent times have increasingly veered round to the view that crime is not only a normal feature and an integral part of all societies but is also a reflection of the state of their health. Social scientists are thus drawn to the interrelationship between socio-economic forces on the one hand and the pattern of criminal behaviour on the other. Unfolding important aspects of social aberration and dysfunction, therefore, the history of crime and criminality is now established as an essential input in the social history of a community.

Secondly, public disorder, resulting from group actions violating legal norms, is closely related to the concept of crime as traditionally understood. Maintenance of public order, i.e., protection of the established order, has been an acknowledged function of governmental administration irrespective of the form or class character of the government. Bengal remained a focal point of the British colonial power in India for a long time and as such continued to be an arena of innovations and experiments in different spheres of the colonial administration. Therefore, the experience of Bengal on the two interrelated issues of crime and public order clearly emerges as a significant area of study. But this is also an area marked by considerable gaps in knowledge. Indeed the state of research on crime and public order for India in general and for Bengal in particular stands out in sharp

contrast against the impressive strides made in this sphere in regard to the western countries.¹

Despite such lacunas in the existing social history of Bengal relating to crime and criminals, the four major issues of public disorder (agrarian unrest, communal disturbance, industrial workers' unrest and political unrest) have received a fair coverage. But there are certain aspects of the last three categories of public disorders which deserve a fresh look. The communal problem, for instance, has been viewed somewhat tangentially either as an instance of British divide-and-rule policy or as a natural consequence of the emerging Hindu revivalism and Muslim fundamentalism. We would try to determine whether a combination of both these factors led to the communal outbursts in Bengal. In this context we will also examine if the phenomena of raw communal outbursts could justifiably be related to concepts of class or community consciousness only or to that of agrarian relations. Communalism—whether of Hindu, Muslim or any other hue—deserves to be categorised as such. Calling it by any other name not only obfuscates a social reality but also indirectly helps the forces of communalism. This realisation in interpreting the past Indian communal scenario has great relevance for an understanding of the happenings of the current decade, not to speak of the communal orgies of the 1940s and the forces behind the truncated geography of this sub-continent.

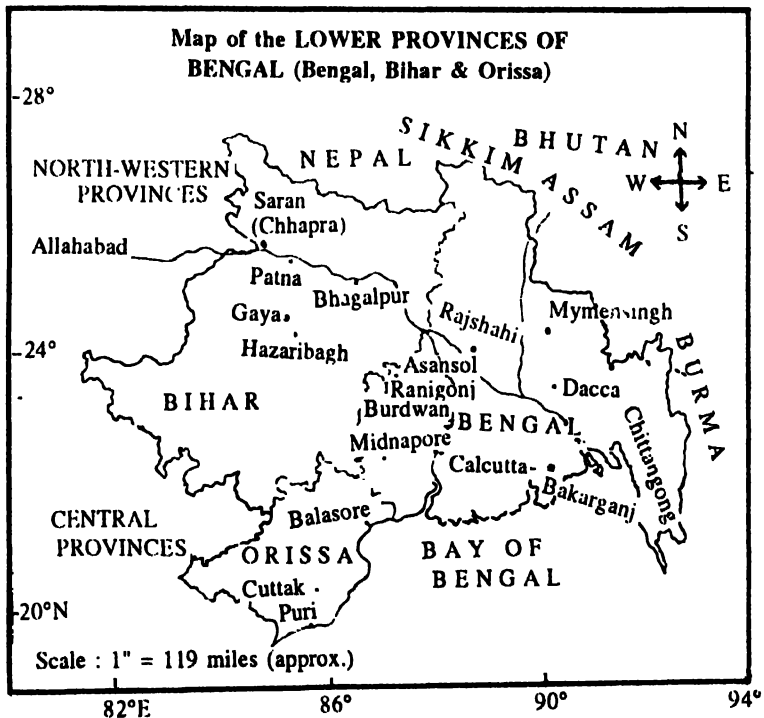
Similarly, the unrest among the industrial workforce in Bengal has quite often been viewed as part of a wider polemic of 'class' or 'community' consciousness.² Here, too, studies have been largely confined to the workers in and around Calcutta and to jute mill labour primarily. A more balanced and broad-based assessment of unrest affecting the industrial workers will be possible when we look at the behaviour patterns of another very large body of workers in Bengal, namely, the coalminers. Some interesting findings also emerge when the protest formats of industrial workers are studied in depth.

Political unrest in Bengal during 1905-12, sometimes straying into the 'blind alley of revolutionary terrorism', has received due attention. But we do need a sharper probe into some significant facets of Bengal terrorism—such as a detailed analysis of the inner organisational functioning of the secret societies which recruited and nurtured the young rebels, the variegated forms of terrorist acts ('revolutionary crimes') and the socio-economic background of the participants in such acts. The present study seeks to fill some of these gaps and this may also

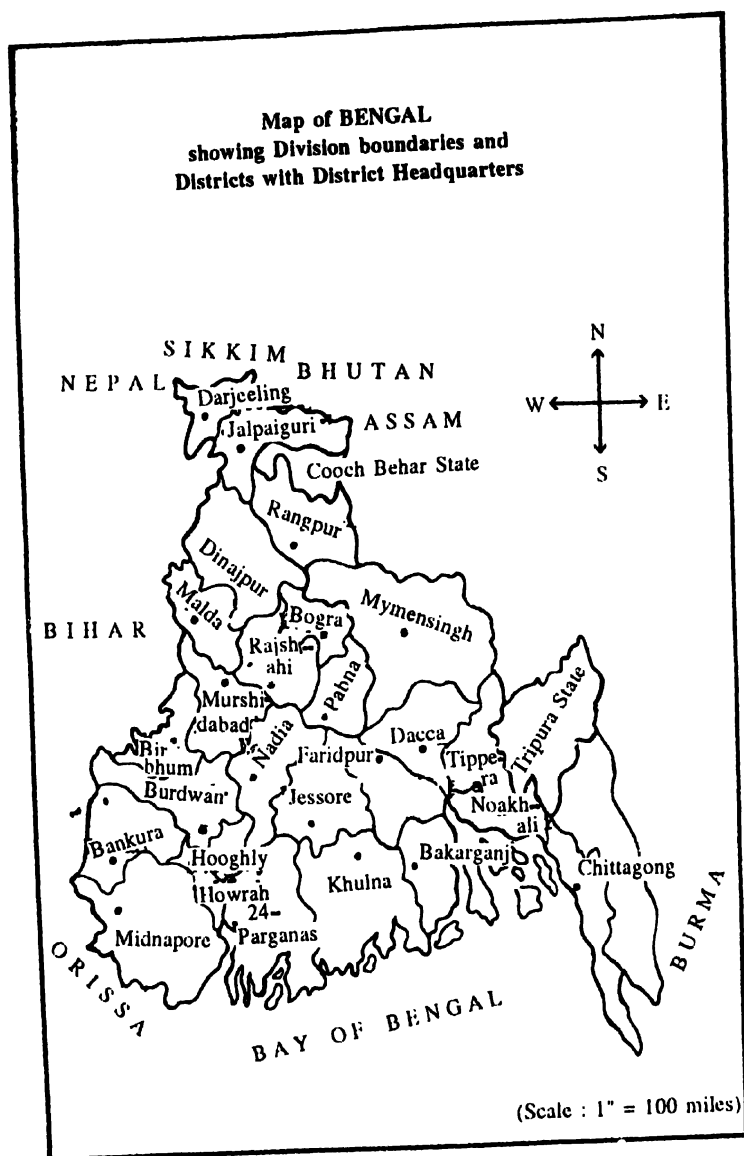
help in a more appropriate assessment of subsequent episodes of terrorism or political extremism.

II

In selecting 1861 and 1912 as the terminal points for this study, we have been guided basically by the following considerations : the Indian Penal Code, 1860 together with the introduction of a professional police organization under the Police Act of 1861 (Act V/1861) laid the foundation of clear and precise definitions of all categories of crimes, and standardisation of crime statistics not only at the provincial but also at the district level. Prior to such standardisation, which started taking shape in Bengal from about 1863-64, the District Magistrates seldom



SOURCE : Census of India, 1891, Vol, III



followed any uniform practice in crime reporting. So any meaningful analysis of crime trends is possible only from about 1863-64, but 1861 continues to be considered as the landmark year in India in the context of its criminal administration because of the conjunction of the three major pieces of legislation on this subject.³

The other terminal year 1912 has a special significance in Bengal's history. On the one hand, it marked the triumph of the anti-partition and swadeshi movement launched in 1905 which forced the colonial government to annul the partition of Bengal; on the other, the districts and divisions which formed the new Bengal presidency continued unaltered till the partition of India in 1947. Our study of crime and public order problems has largely been confined to the above geographical area of Bengal which came into existence on the annulment of the 1905 partition.⁴

Moreover, Bengal may be said to have stepped into the modern era during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth and this corresponds largely with the period of our study. Significant social changes, growth in industrialisation, urbanization and communication—all these factors left an indelible imprint on Bengal's social history. Such changes could not but cast their shadow on the Bengal crime scene as well. Simultaneously, criminal administration also assumed a modern look during this period. Hence a study of the changing patterns of crime, criminals and criminality during this crucial period is a basic requirement for an understanding of the underworld of Bengal society during a critical transitional phase. Secondly, the above socio-economic changes also gave a new identity to certain social groups—industrial workers and the educated middle class in particular—which became not only increasingly vocal but started having a growing impact in the arena of public order, a trend which became pronounced in the subsequent decades. No account of the issues and problems of public order in Bengal, therefore, can be meaningful without an assessment of their impact during the formative stages of these emerging social groups.

The first decade of the twentieth century in Bengal was not merely a temporal shift from one century to another: it was truly a watershed in the annals of crime and public order in modern Bengal. As this study will show, the turn of the century saw a new genre of crime and criminals with distinctive behaviour patterns and the emergence of a new social group at the forefront of resistance to the colonial administration.

The chief repositories of information for our purpose have been the proceedings of the Government of India in the Home (Police, Judicial, Political, Public, Marine), Revenue and Agriculture (Land Revenue) and Legislative departments. Similarly, the proceedings of the Government of Bengal in General, Judicial, Police and Political departments have also yielded useful source material. We have also looked at the official reports on the river-borne traffic of the Lower Provinces of Bengal, trade carried by rail and river in Bengal and the inland trade of Calcutta for substantiating some of our findings. For the first time, an attempt has been made in the course of this study to systematically scan the archival holdings in the record rooms of the Inspector-General of Police, West Bengal, the Bengal Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Bengal Intelligence Branch (IB), all located in Calcutta. Certain rare documents/reports were discovered in these little-known archives which provide valuable evidence on some of the issues taken up for analysis. These collections include statements made before the police, the magistrates and the courts by members of political dacoit gangs and other participants in revolutionary crimes. Many of these statements and documentations of seized papers were found to contain a wealth of details about recruitment, training, organization and modus operandi of ordinary criminal gangs as well as secret societies or samitis engaged in revolutionary/terrorist activity. In addition, we have consulted Bengali books, articles and newspapers as also literary works which throw light on the contemporaneous socio-economic environment. To understand the motivations and inner tensions of participants in revolutionary activities, we have also studied the autobiographical accounts of a number of Bengal revolutionaries.

III

Our failure to recognise the significance of delinquency as an entry point to social tensions, conflicts and social values has not been perhaps the only cause for the neglect of crime as part of social history. It is quite possible that our social historians have avoided unravelling the contours of crime due to a deep distrust of crime statistics and the widespread belief that statistics in readily usable form are not available. Such apprehension is not entirely unwarranted nor is this attitude peculiar to the Indian situation alone. However, the biases and distortions inherent

in a body of data can at least be partly compensated through methodical scrutiny and revision to make it a useful tool for the study of social history.

Believing in the efficacy of such an approach, the statistical base for this study has been built up by scrutinising and gleaning data from a very large number of Bengal Police Annual Administration Reports and Bengal Jail Annual Administration Reports. This perhaps represents the first venture in formulating a quantitative chronology of crime and criminals for a historical period. Our task was difficult due to the fact that almost throughout the period of our study, Bengal proper was not a separate administrative entity differentiated from Greater Bengal, i.e., the Lower Provinces of Bengal (LPB). As such, province totals in official statistics usually referred to the latter region. As a consequence, our time series for total cognisable crime, major heads of crime, police strength and other relevant indicators for Bengal proper had to be laboriously built up from district level data which were not always reflected in the annual police administration reports.

It is necessary at this stage to address ourselves to the connotation of crime for this study and to the nature of our data base for the quantitative analysis of crime. Sociologically, crime is a special form of deviance from the accepted norms of behaviour in a given society during a particular period of time. There is a considerable difference of opinion, however, in regard to the nuances of a legal definition of crime. The dictionary meaning of crime as an "act (usually grave offence, punishable by law" (COD, 1977 Indian reprint) is only partial. Omission or failure to act in certain circumstances is also punishable by the law and as such an offence. Surprisingly, neither the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC) nor the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr.P.C.) has given us any clear and comprehensive definition of crime or criminal behaviour. All that the former (i.e. IPC) does is to define 'offence' as a 'thing punishable by the Code or any special or local law' (section 40 of the IPC). In the absence of any better standard or reference point, therefore, we will confine ourselves to the above legal definition of crime as any act or omission punishable by law, though we are aware of its limitation for certain circumstances. Generally, we will also use the terms 'crime' and 'offence' as functionally synonymous. In the second place, we will take into account, especially for some of our quantitative analysis, only that group of crimes which is regarded under the Indian law as 'cognisable', being of relatively graver import than those called

'non- cognisable'.⁵ Offences which are scheduled as cognisable under the Indian law are somewhat analogous to offences which are called 'indictable' in most of the western countries. In the third place, our study of the Bengal crime scene concentrates on the Bengal countryside (comprising 26 districts of Bengal proper) to the virtual exclusion of Calcutta's crime trends. The crime profile of the metropolitan city of Calcutta can never be compared with that of rural Bengal as the realities at those two levels are entirely different. Another complexity in the maze of statistical data relating to crime and criminals needs to be resolved before we take up any meaningful analysis of crime and criminality. The data on this subject may pertain to (a) crimes/cases reported to police and magistrates, (b) those investigated by police out of the total cases reported, (c) cases sent up for trial in court out of the cases investigated by police and (d) cases ending in conviction out of those tried in courts. It may be noted here that these four sets of data would capture a successively declining magnitude of crime : not all cases reported are taken up for investigation, nor do all cases investigated uncover the requisite degree of evidence which would entitle them being sent up to courts for trial, and convictions are handed out in courts in only some of the cases tried, the other tried cases ending in acquittal etc.⁶

There are some inherent inadequacies in each of these four or other available data series on crime. Let us first take the case of 'crimes reported'. Either the victim of a crime or some one on his behalf has to make a report – orally or in writing – to a police officer or a magistrate having jurisdiction.⁷ The level of actual criminality can be expected to be reasonably correctly reflected in the 'crimes reported' only if both the parties – the victim or some one on his behalf or any other person aware of the commission of the crime and the police or the magistrate – perform their statutory obligations properly. In reality, however, both parties do not always do so, though for entirely different reasons. The usual and known reasons for failure of the victim's side to report crime are, among others, ignorance of the law, fear of reprisal, lack of confidence in the criminal administration system in general and the police in particular, long delays involved in trial, harassment in court in course of trial, uncertainty of punishment etc.

The police is also responsible for a certain quantum of offences not being put on their records due to apathy and inertia, lack of integrity, lack of adequate resources to investigate cases and a tendency to show 'on paper' that crime has not gone beyond control and thus avoid public

and official censure. Added to these is the failure of zamindars, village headmen, dafadars and chowkidars in reporting crimes to the police in accordance with their statutory obligations. Likewise, the magistrates were often reluctant to register cases under section 190 Cr.P.C., which they are legally enjoined to do, apprehending that these cases will eventually swell their list of cases pending trial.

The inadequacy of court statistics or 'cases tried / convicted' for determining the volume and types of crime would become apparent from the following hypothetical but highly probable statistical illustration : if a community experiences, say, 100 incidents of cognisable crime in a year, not more than 80 are likely to be reported to or recorded by the police. Out of these 80 criminal cases, again, chances are that the police would be able to submit charge-sheets (i.e., send up to court for trial) in only about 50%, i.e., 40 cases. Finally, again assuming a relatively high average rate of conviction, it is not likely that more than 50% of the cases sent up for trial will end in conviction. Thus not more than 20 cases out of the original 80 reported/recorded crimes would be reflected in the conviction data. Therefore, analysis of the level and composition of crime on the basis of court statistics would hardly reflect reality as these represent merely the proverbial tip of the iceberg.

Experts in criminology, criminal history and criminal statistics appear to agree that the most acceptable sample of actual crime is that obtained as early in the process of criminal justice administration as possible. Thus 'crimes reported' to police and magistrates are generally accepted as a better guide than the number of accused prosecuted or convicted.⁸ We have accordingly taken as the statistical core of our study the crimes reported in Bengal during 1864-1912 as compiled in the Bengal Police Annual Administration Reports (BPAARs).

At this juncture a note of warning would be in order. A dark area of unreported or unrecorded crimes is inevitable. The level of actual criminality in a given society being the sum total of offences reported/recorded by police/magistracy and the unreported/unrecorded offences, neither the statistics of crimes reported nor of crimes tried in court can be said to be a correct reflection of the reality. But there is no reason to presume that the deficiency of official criminal statistics is less obvious in advanced western countries than it is in ours.⁹

Prior to the introduction of the Police Act of 1861 in Bengal¹⁰ there was no uniformity in crime reporting by the District Magistrates who

were also the district police chiefs. In his annul police administration report for 1863, the first Inspector General of Bengal Police (C.F.Carnac of the Bengal Civil Service) remarked that under the old regime, there were many different ways of recording the amount of crime. Not infrequently, the Daroga and Naib Daroga having enquired into a case reported at their Thana declared the same to be frivolous or false and forthwith struck it out from the list of crime reported to have been committed. Again, it was the practice of some District Magistrates, when forwarding quarterly or annual returns of crime, to calculate the acquittals only upon those sent up for trial ; those who were apprehended or released on bail by police never appearing at all.¹¹

From May 1865 the IGP introduced a set of new forms for crime reporting. By about 1864-65 some semblance of uniformity in crime reporting could be achieved mainly due to the co-ordinating efforts of the newly introduced Deputy Inspectors General of Police.¹² Crime returns were further streamlined from 1867 in accordance with the recommendations of the Statistical Committee of 1866. Further modifications were introduced in 1870, 1882-83 and 1905 under Government instructions.¹³

In the face of these numerous changes in the official system of recording/reporting crime, leading sometimes to gaps in coverage, construction of a satisfactory statistical series proved to be a formidable task. This necessitated a careful scrutiny of hundreds of reports on crime and other related issues in order to preserve year-to-year continuity and data. And it is hoped that, in the words of G.R. Elton, this 'ground-clearing operation' would help later studies of crimes and criminals of this region.

IV

The work is divided into two parts : Part I deals with the general trends of crime in its diverse forms, its regional patterns and the socio-economic characteristics of the participants in such deviant acts. Part II brings out certain unexplored facets of the three major public order problems which rocked Bengal for the first time – communal disturbances, unrest among the industrial workers and terrorist violence. We have also tried to analyse their causes and take a close look at the participants in such disorders. Both in Parts I and II special attention has been paid to the

responses of the colonial administration and its changing perceptions regarding crime and public order issues.

Part I begins with our response to the total lack of a suitable data base for a quantitative analysis of crime. In Chapter 2, therefore, we present several carefully formulated time series on crime and criminality for Bengal and each of its five divisions (Burdwan, Presidency, Rajshahi, Dacca and Chittagong) covering a fairly long period of 49 years (1864-1912). This chapter also brings out the major manifestations of crime and the trends in criminality – temporal and spatial – both at macro (province) and micro (division and district) levels. Chapter 3 provides a glimpse into some special features of the Bengal crime scene. Thus an analysis of the incidence of murder in Bengal has led to some interesting findings about its uneven geographical spread among the divisions and districts. Dacoity, a scourge in the Bengal countryside with its special Bengal variant of river dacoity, claims a special place in this chapter. We will also examine certain criminological hypotheses about the relationship between crime and industrialisation, and crime and scarcity.

Focussing on the theme of socio-economic offences in Bengal (including the Lower Provinces of Bengal), Chapter 4 unfolds quite a few intriguing findings about offences relating to women and children like infanticide, female infanticide, death of children by wilful exposure, illegal trade in minors for immoral purposes etc. Various aspects of suicide are reviewed including the sex ratio of suicide victims, suicide by children and proneness of certain districts in regard to suicide. Finally, we have taken a bird's eye view of economic offences (white collar crime) to see if any significant trend was noticeable which could be a precursor of subsequent developments in this new genre of crime and criminals. Chapter 5 is devoted to an understanding of the Bengal criminals including people of exotic origin who chose this region for their criminal depredations. It also brings to light their motivations, modus operandi, caste and class configurations and socio-economic background. The focus in this chapter is, thus, shifted from crime and criminality to the identity of social groups resorting to criminal behaviour.

Part II on public order begins by taking note of the widening Hindu-Muslim communal divide which started assuming disturbing proportions in Bengal too from about the last decade of the nineteenth century. Chapter 6 draws a careful distinction between the pre-partition (i.e. pre-1905) and post-partition communal riots both in terms of the

participants as well as the motivations and techniques behind these outrages; this has led to some interesting and valuable findings which can be put to constructive purposes by those interested in stemming the tide of communalism in our region. In this context we also take note of the marked change in the perceptions of the colonial administration in regard to the genesis of communal disturbances and in the manner of their handling.

Chapter 7 touches on a new form of public disorder – industrial workers' unrest and brings to light the various manifestations of unrest together with the responses of the administration to the agitational activities of a newly emerged group of protestors. A comparative study of labour behaviour in the two principal industrial sectors of Bengal – textiles and coal—perhaps represents a fresh analytical perspective.

Militant nationalism combined with revolutionary terrorism in the wake of the anti-partition and swadeshi movements during 1905-12 was the most aggravated form of public disorder which convulsed Bengal during our period of study. Its immediate impact was an acute perception of threat to the very legitimacy of colonial rule. In Chapter 8 we have tried to explore the resultant reactions of a beleaguered administration which further heightened the impetus to defiance on the part of a new bhadralok class subjected to decades of humiliation and inferiority complex. This chapter also analyses the temporal and regional patterns of political violence including political (swadeshi) dacoity and socio-economic background of the participants.

Finally, the main findings of this study on crime, criminals and public order are brought together in Chapter 9 and these are sought to be correlated to a broader perspective of the social forces and colonial perceptions at play. We have also projected certain questions to which this study could find no satisfactory answer, with the hope that these will be taken up as separate issues to be probed in greater depth by the scholars interested in the social history of Bengal.

NOTES

1. In the Indian context, the notable exceptions are -
David H. Bayley, "Violent public protest in India : 1900-1960", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol.XXIV,1963.
Baldev Raj Nayar, *Violence and crime in India, a quantitative study*, Delhi, 1975.

- David Arnold, "Dacoity and rural crime in Madras, 1860-1940", *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, January 1975, vol.6, no.2; "Looting, grain riots and government policy in south India, 1918", *Past and Present*, Aug. 1979; *Police power and colonial rule : Madras, 1859-1947*, OUP, 1986.
- Anand Yang (ed.), *Crime and criminality in British India*, Arizona, 1985.
2. Ranajit Das Gupta, "Material conditions and behavioural aspects of Calcutta working class, 1875-99", *Occasional paper* no. 22 of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC), Calcutta, 1979.

Dipesh Chakrabarti, "Communal riots and labour: Bengal's jute mill hands in the 1890s," *Past and Present*, May 1981.

Dipesh Chakrabarti and Ranajit Das Gupta. "Some aspects of labour history of Bengal in the nineteenth century : two views", *Occasional Paper* no. 40, CSSSC, 1981.
 - 3. The Indian Penal Code (1860) came into operation in 1861, the year in which the Criminal Procedure Code and the Police Act were brought into the statute book.
 - 4. The geographical area of Bengal for this study includes the five revenue divisions of Burdwan, Presidency, Rajshahi, Dacca and Chittagong comprising 26 districts (see Appendix I). In Chapter 4 (socio- economic offences) we had to deviate from this geographical norm to some extent as relevant data for the Bengal districts alone could not be extracted for all the years.
 - 5. 'Cognisable offence' means an offence in which a police officer may, in accordance with the express and specific provisions of law, arrest without warrant a person accused or suspected of such an offence: section 2(c) of the Cr.PC. Cognisable offence also means an offence in respect of which the police can take up investigation suo moto and without being required to obtain prior permission of the magistrate: sec.156 Cr.PC. All other offences are non-cognisable, i.e., police can take up investigation of such offences only on the order of a competent magistrate (sec. 155 Cr.PC) and cannot make any arrest in such a case without obtaining a warrant from a competent court.
 - 6. For instance, in 1901 in the Lower Provinces of Bengal (LPB), 1,78,646 cognisable cases were reported, out of which 76% were investigated; of the cases decided in courts, 83% ended in convictions. Likewise, of the 90,235 persons tried in courts in LPB during the year, only 76.2% were convicted : *Bengal Police Annual Administration Report*. (HPAAR), 1901. p.16 and Appendix Statement A, part IV, pp.xii-xiii.
 - 7. Sections 154 and 200 Cr.PC. The law also provides for suo moto registration of a criminal case by the police (sec.157 Cr.PC) or by the magistrate (sec.190 Cr.PC.).
 - 8. M.B Clinard and D.J. Abbot, *Crime in developing countries*, 1973, pp.22-23.

J.M Beattie, "The pattern of crime in England, 1600-1800", *Past and Present*, 1974, vol.62, p.54.

Thorsten Sellin and Marvin Wolfgang, *The measurement of delinquency*, 1964.

Thorsten Sellin, "The significance of records of crime" in Leon Radzinowicz and Marvin Wolfgang (eds.), *Crime and justice, vol 1 the criminal in society*, 1971.
 - 9. For example, a sample survey in USA showed that 180 boys admitted to 1,22,471 offences of which only 2597 came to the notice of the police: M.L. Erickson and L.T. Empey, "Government records., undetected delinquency and decision making", *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science*, 1963, no.54, pp.456-69.

Another US study showed that only one- third of housebreaking offences revealed by the victims to the interviewers had been reported to the police : P.H.Enis, *Criminal investigation in the U.S.*, University of Chicago, 1967.

10. The new police system under the Police Act of 1861 was introduced in Burdwan, Bankura and Birbhum districts from 1 Oct.1862 : *Report on the Bengal Police for 1862*, para 7. The remaining districts of Bengal, with the exception of Darjeeling, were brought under the new system on 1st. January 1864; it was introduced in Darjeeling district towards the middle of 1864: *Third Annual Report of the working of the civil constabulary, Lower Provinces of Bengal* (1864).
11. *Second Annual Report of the working of the civil constabulary, Lower Provinces, Bengal*, 1863, para 24.
12. *Third Annual Report of the working of the civil constabulary, Lower Provinces of Bengal* (1864), p. 33.
13. Districtwise crime reporting in the BPAARs was discontinued from 1870. The format of the annual police administration report was changed under Government of India instructions of Sept.1882. Districtwise and divisionwise breakup of crime figures in the Appendices was discontinued from 1887 to 1896; however, in 1897 districtwise crime figures were included in a supplementary appendix (Departmental crime returns) of the BPAARs but again in 1900 the BPAAR format underwent some changes including deletion of divisionwise totals of crimes. From 1905, only 'true cases investigated' were shown in the BPAARs, leaving out the cases which were ascertained to be 'false' after investigation.

2 Crime In Bengal : General Trends and Regional Variations (1864-1912)

In this work the total number of cognisable crime (TC) *reported* to police and/or magistrates has been accepted as basic statistics for our analysis. But in the Bengal police annual administration reports from 1905 onwards, the crime data are mostly in respect of cases which were ascertained to be *true* after investigation. In other words, the number of the latter category of cases is bound to be less than the total number of reported cases. Hence no meaningful comparison can be made between TCs of the 1864-1904 period and those of the 1905-1912 period. As such our analysis of crime trends is carried out under two separate time periods in the first section of this chapter. Thereafter, in the second section, we consider the specifics of crime in terms of its major manifestations.

Table 2.1 shows periodic fluctuations in TC for Bengal and the five divisions separately, followed by two graphical representations in charts 2.1A and 2.1B.

The two charts display three major patterns of TC in Bengal during the 1864-1904 period. First, the long-term trend in cognisable crimes was unmistakably upward, starting with an all- Bengal figure of 24.7

TABLE 2.1
Total cognisable crime (thousand) : Bengal and divisions
1864-1912 (selected years)

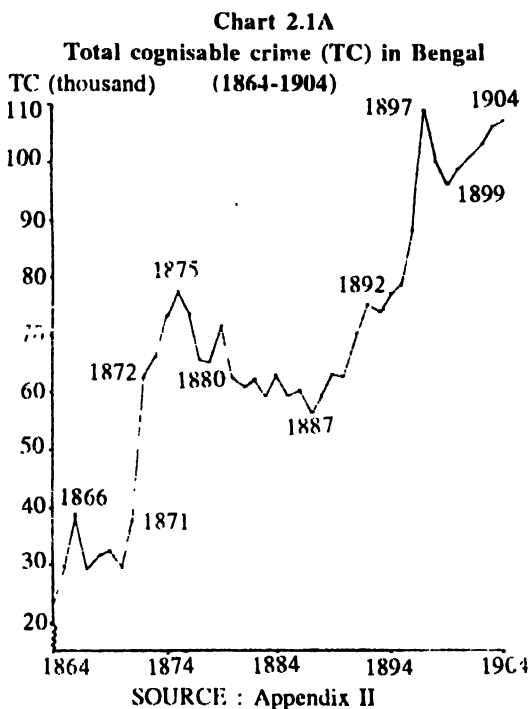
| Year | Bengal | Burdwan | Presidency | Rajshahi | Dacca | Chittagong |
|-------|--------|---------|------------|----------|-------|------------|
| 1864 | 24.7 | 5.5 | 4.0 | 7.7 | 4.1 | 3.3 |
| 1865 | 29.9 | 7.3 | 5.2 | 7.6 | 6.9 | 2.8 |
| 1866* | 38.8 | 12.8 | 9.3 | 8.4 | 5.2 | 3.0 |
| 1867 | 29.4 | 9.6 | 6.5 | 6.9 | 3.9 | 2.5 |
| 1870 | 29.3 | 8.3 | 8.7 | 7.1 | 3.8 | 1.3 |
| 1871 | 37.3 | 10.0 | 11.1 | 7.8 | 6.4 | 2.1 |
| 1872 | 62.9 | 15.2 | 16.2 | 13.8 | 13.6 | 4.0 |
| 1873* | 66.1 | 16.0 | 15.5 | 15.7 | 14.8 | 4.2 |
| 1874 | 73.1 | 18.7 | 17.6 | 16.4 | 15.8 | 4.6 |
| 1875 | 75.7 | 18.3 | 19.0 | 15.8 | 17.0 | 5.6 |
| 1876 | 73.4 | 17.1 | 17.5 | 15.9 | 17.2 | 5.7 |
| 1881 | 61.0 | 18.1 | 14.7 | 11.4 | 11.6 | 5.1 |
| 1887 | 56.6 | 13.3 | 13.1 | 14.9 | 11.0 | 4.3 |
| 1890 | 62.9 | 15.9 | 14.9 | 13.9 | 13.4 | 4.8 |
| 1891 | 69.6 | 18.0 | 15.3 | 15.0 | 15.6 | 5.5 |
| 1895 | 78.8 | 20.4 | 16.9 | 16.7 | 19.4 | 5.5 |
| 1896 | 87.9 | 23.0 | 18.1 | 16.8 | 22.8 | 7.3 |
| 1897* | 108.4 | 29.4 | 24.2 | 19.8 | 25.2 | 9.8 |
| 1898 | 99.9 | 25.9 | 21.7 | 18.8 | 23.6 | 9.9 |
| 1899 | 95.7 | 25.8 | 21.0 | 17.4 | 22.9 | 8.6 |
| 1901 | 100.4 | 26.4 | 22.3 | 19.1 | 23.1 | 9.6 |
| 1904 | 106.5 | 30.6 | 23.2 | 20.1 | 24.3 | 8.3 |
| 1905 | 63.9 | 18.6 | 14.9 | 12.8 | 13.2 | 4.4 |
| 1906 | 76.0 | 21.0 | 16.7 | 14.6 | 18.3 | 5.5 |
| 1909 | 69.8 | 20.6 | 15.4 | 13.8 | 15.2 | 4.8 |
| 1911 | 71.8 | 19.9 | 16.6 | 13.5 | 16.4 | 5.3 |
| 1912 | 73.4 | 19.7 | 15.9 | 14.7 | 17.3 | 5.7 |

Note : *represents a famine year.

Source : Bengal Police Annual Administration Reports (BPAARs) 1864 - 1912.
 (See Appendix II for the full series of TC and other crime figures for the period 1864 - 1912).

thousand crimes in 1864 and ending with 106.5 thousand in 1904. Secondly, a fairly stable plateau is visible, covering nearly a decade from 1880. The official reports attributed this phenomenon to (a) a succession

of good harvests and (b) increased efficiency and effectiveness of the police in preventive and investigative work including closer surveillance over wandering criminal gangs. We will shortly discuss how far we can accept this official explanation. Thirdly, three distinct peaks in TC occur



in 1866, 1875 and 1897 showing the impact of economic distress in the shape of famine and scarcity. Predictably, the increase in TC in 1866 was very pronounced in the Burdwan division which was badly affected by that year's famine. The 1875 peak is noticeable in two ways : firstly, it does not exactly correspond with the peak of the food scarcity of 1873-74 (commonly known as the Bihar famine), and secondly, it is the continuation of a steadily rising trend from 1871. A possible explanation of the first, which contradicts the claim of the Government that 1875 was a normal year of crime and police activity and efficiency, is to be found in the maze of crime returns of the period. These show that petty cognisable crimes registered a substantial increase in 1875;¹ we will examine whether offences of this category had any link with the 1873-74

distress period and were in fact a fall-out of the same. Of all the four divisions of Bengal proper, Rajshahi had the sharpest rise in TC in 1872 – four of its eight districts (viz. Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur and Malda) were the worst amongst the scarcity-affected districts of Bengal.

The third major upswing in TC begins from 1888 and culminates in 1897 in the highest ever point in the nineteenth century. Though the following two years (1898-99) were marked by a dip, the upward trend began again in 1900 and continued at least till 1904. Some later official reports sought to explain away this rising trend from 1888, discernible in all the five divisions, as mainly due to better and 'freer' reporting of cases at police stations. This could have been partly true as a short-term trend. Searching for a more plausible explanation for such a long-term upward trend, one can notice a marked linkage between this and the growing distress among the poorer sections of the people due to periods of bad harvests and rising food prices, especially of common rice—the staple food for a Bengali home. The following Table gives some indication of the upward movement in the prices of common rice between 1882-83 and 1895-96.

TABLE 2.2
Mean price of common rice in Bengal (selected years)

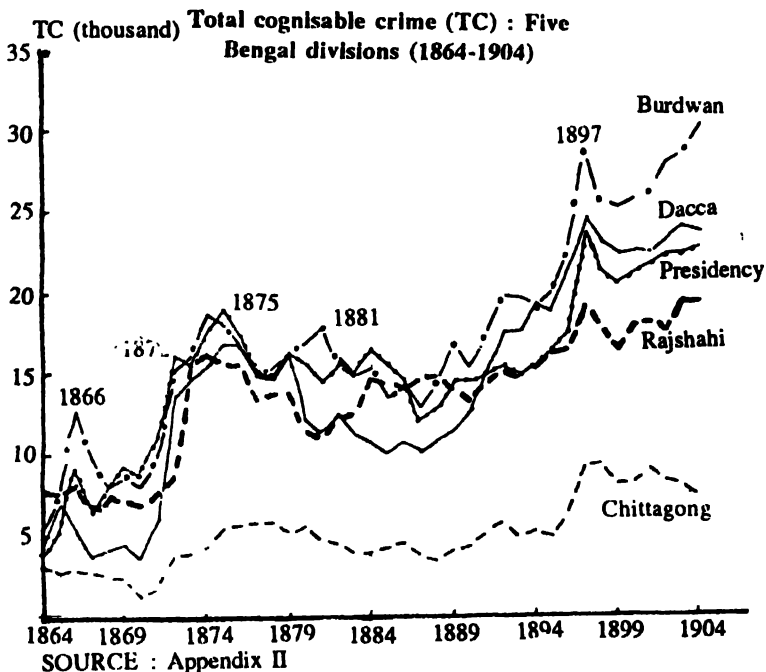
| Year | Price of common rice (Seers per Rupf) |
|---------|---------------------------------------|
| 1882-83 | 24.9 |
| 1883-84 | 18.4 |
| 1889-90 | 15.3 |
| 1890-91 | 16.4 |
| 1891-92 | 13.2 |
| 1893 | 11.4 |
| 1894 | 12.9 |
| 1895 | 16.3 |
| 1896 | 12.1 |

Source : Mukul Mukherjee, "Some aspects of economic change in Bengal, 1870-1930", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Delhi University, 1982 : Tables 5.5 and 5.6.

In the post-1896 period also the price of common rice continued to be quite high, around 12 seers per rupee, and some of the official reports took note of this important contributory factor. However, certain other factors too were at play in escalating the TC level (e.g.

industrialisation, migration, improved means of communication leading to increased mobility of criminals and so on) which we will duly consider.

Chart 2.1B



The crime trends for the 1905-1912 period have to be viewed separately on account of a change in the official system of presenting crime data. From 1905 onwards, instead of the earlier practice of referring to all *reported* cognisable cases, the official TC figures take into account only 'true cases investigated'. Keeping in mind this altered data base for 1905 - 1912, it will be seen from Table 2.1 that there was a significant increase in TC in 1906 as compared to 1905 - from 64 thousand to 76 thousand. During the remaining six years of this period, the fluctuations in TC were of the order of ± 7 thousand, the first three years showing a decline and the last three years an uptrend. To a certain extent these fluctuations correspond to the ebb and flow pattern of the anti-partition and swadeshi agitation in Bengal. But an equally potent factor appears to be the abnormal rise in the price level during the early

years of the twentieth century. As Table 2.3 shows, the price indices for north-east and south-west Bengal rose sharply by about 20 points between 1905 and 1906 as compared to the moderate increases in the subsequent years. We shall have occasion to see in the next chapter that high prices of necessities, denoting periods of economic distress, are generally attended with increasing number of crimes, specially property offences.

TABLE 2.3
Unweighted index numbers for wholesale prices : India and Bengal
(1903 - 1912)

| | 1903 | 1904 | 1905 | 1906 | 1907 | 1908 | 1909 | 1910 | 1911 | 1912 |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| All India average | 107 | 106 | 116 | 129 | 133 | 145 | 127 | 125 | 125 | 131 |
| Calcutta | 104 | 105 | 113 | 126 | 131 | 140 | 128 | 123 | 122 | 129 |
| North-east Bengal | 106 | 105 | 116 | 136 | 143 | 146 | 136 | 127 | 135 | 145 |
| South-west Bengal | 107 | 106 | 116 | 135 | 142 | 149 | 135 | 132 | 134 | 142 |

Note : Average for 1890-94 = 100

Source : K.L.Datta, *Report on the enquiry into the rise of prices in India*, 1914-15, Vol.I, pp.ii, 32, 40, 41.

Taking a more disaggregative view of the behaviour of TC during 1905 - 1912, we find that TC movements in all the five divisions were noticeably upward, reaching the peak in 1906, except in Burdwan where its maximum impact was felt a year later (1907). The rise (1905-06) and fall (1907-08) in Dacca division were more marked than in any of the other divisions, and the subsequent rising trend in this division was both steady and uninterrupted (1909-12). The intensity of the anti-partition agitation in Dacca division and its by-product (i.e. general disregard for governmental authority) may be part of the explanation for such special features in Dacca division during this period (1905-12). Another important factor for the uninterrupted rise since 1908 is the relatively greater disorganisation of the police in that part of Bengal owing to their preoccupation with the anti-partition agitation; this, in turn, meant much less attention to 'habitual' criminals. Thus burglary and theft cases taken together (always the two major components of TC) continued to be at a much higher level than the pre-1905 figures as shown in Table 2.4.

TABLE 2.4
Dacca division : Burglary and Theft cases (B+T) : 1901-1912

| Year | Total no. of B+T cases |
|------|------------------------|
| 1901 | 9232 |
| 1902 | 9904 |
| 1903 | 10899 |
| 1904 | 10324 |
| 1905 | 11179 |
| 1906 | 14969 |
| 1907 | 13621 |
| 1911 | 12708 |
| 1912 | 12656 |

Source : Appendix II.

It would be worthwhile at this stage to observe the decadal rate of change in the volume of cognisable crime in the five divisions and in Bengal. 1870 has been taken as the starting year because by then the system of crime reporting had achieved greater uniformity; besides, the effects of the abnormal year - the famine of 1866 - may be said to have abated. The years 1905- 1912 have been taken as a separate block for reasons explained earlier.

It will appear from Table 2.5 that the annual rate of increase in TC in Bengal over the 1870-1904 period was roughly 7.5%, the highest being in Dacca division (15.4%) and the lowest in Presidency (4.8%). For the 1905-12 period, it has been much less (2.1%). Two factors may be responsible for this difference. A relatively disorganized criminal administration system and communication system in nineteenth century Bengal may have led to non-recording of a substantial number of criminal cases in the initial years. As things began to improve, it is likely that an upward bias crept into the annual TC figures leading to a fairly high annual growth rate for TC during 1870-1904. Secondly, it has to be remembered that TC figures for the two periods reviewed are not strictly comparable because of the change in the official connotation of TC since 1905 and hence the difference in the TC growth rates is more apparent than real.

II

Perhaps a more realistic picture of the long-term rate of change is obtained when crime is related to population. We must therefore relate

TABLE 2.5
Variations in total cognisable crime (TC) : Bengal and divisions, 1870-1912

| | 1870 | 1880 | 1885 | 1900 | 1904 | 1870-1904 absolute & % change | 1870-1904 average annual % change | 1905 | 1912 | 1905-1912 absolute & % change | 1905-1912 average annual % change |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--|--|-------|-------|--|---|
| Burdwan TC | 8311 | 17078 | 15880 | 26228 | 30623 | 22312 | | 18637 | 19737 | 1100 | |
| % change | | 105.5 | -7.0 | 65.2 | 16.8 | 268.5 | 7.7 | | | 5.9 | 0.8 |
| Presidency TC | 8714 | 15685 | 14945 | 21552 | 23206 | 14492 | | 14948 | 15911 | 903 | |
| % change | | 80.0 | -4.7 | 44.2 | 7.7 | 166.3 | 4.8 | | | 6.4 | 0.9 |
| Rajshahi TC | 7117 | 11796 | 13884 | 18942 | 20076 | 12959 | | 12767 | 14738 | 1971 | |
| % change | | 65.7 | 17.7 | 36.4 | 6.0 | 182.1 | 5.2 | | | 15.4 | 2.2 |
| Dacca TC | 3803 | 12366 | 13421 | 23302 | 24296 | 20493 | | 13162 | 17278 | 4116 | |
| % change | | 225.2 | 8.53 | 42.4 | 4.3 | 538.9 | 15.4 | | | 31.3 | 4.5 |
| Chittagong TC | 1316 | 5802 | 4786 | 8870 | 8283 | 6967 | | 4386 | 5734 | 1348 | |
| % change | | 340.9 | -17.5 | 46.0 | -6.6 | 529.4 | 15.1 | | | 30.7 | 4.4 |
| Bengal TC | 29261 | 62727 | 62916 | 98894 | 106484 | 77223 | | 63900 | 73398 | 9498 | |
| % change | | 53.4 | 0.32 | 57.1 | 7.7 | 264.0 | 7.5 | | | 14.9 | 2.1 |

Source : Bengal Police Annual Administration Reports (relevant years).

the number of recorded offences to the size and character of the population. Otherwise we might be tempted to assume that an increase in the absolute number of recorded crimes reflects an increase in criminality, while it may simply be due to a growing population.²

The following table and chart bring together the growth rate of population and the growth rate of crime (TC) in terms of crime (TC) per one lakh population for the period 1872- 1911.

TABLE 2.6
Population (In lakhs) and TC per one lakh (1,00,000) population :
Bengal and divisions (1872-1911)

| | 1872 | 1881 | 1891 | 1901 | 1911 | % change 1872- 1901 | Average ann- ual % change 1872-1901 |
|---------------------------|-------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------------------------|---|
| BURDWAN | | | | | | | |
| Population | 76.0 | 73.9 | 76.9 | 82.4 | 84.7 | 8.4 | 0.3 |
| TC per lakh population | 200.6 | 244.5 | 234.7 | 320.3 | 235.4 | 59.8 | 2.1 |
| | | (21.9) | (-4.0) | (36.5) | (-26.5) | | |
| PRESIDENCY | | | | | | | |
| Population | 74.1 | 81.9 | 85.2 | 89.7 | 94.2 | 21.1 | 0.7 |
| TC per lakh population | 218.0 | 180.0 | 179.7 | 248.0 | 176.6 | 13.8 | 0.5 |
| | | (-17.4) | (-0.2) | (38.0) | (-28.8) | | |
| RAJSHAHI | | | | | | | |
| Population | 80.5 | 84.4 | 88.4 | 93.9 | 101.7 | 16.5 | 0.6 |
| TC per lakh population | 171.6 | 135.5 | 170.6 | 203.6 | 132.7 | 18.6 | 0.6 |
| | | (-21.0) | (25.0) | (19.3) | (-34.8) | | |
| DACCA | | | | | | | |
| Population | 75.6 | 86.7 | 98.0 | 107.4 | 119.6 | 42.0 | 1.5 |
| TC per lakh population | 180.2 | 134.2 | 159.5 | 214.8 | 137.4 | 19.2 | 0.7 |
| | | (-25.5) | (18.8) | (34.7) | (-36.0) | | |
| CHITTAGONG | | | | | | | |
| Population | 34.9 | 36.2 | 42.5 | 48.0 | 54.7 | 27.4 | * 1.0 |
| TC per lakh population | 116.0 | 140.8 | 130.0 | 199.0 | 96.4 | 71.6 | 2.5 |
| | | (21.4) | (-7.7) | (53.1) | (51.6) | | |
| BENGAL | | | | | | | |
| Population | 341.2 | 363.2 | 391.0 | 421.5 | 454.9 | 23.5 | 0.8 |
| TC per lakh population | 184.3 | 168.0 | 178.0 | 238.2 | 157.8 | 29.2 | 1.0 |
| | | (-8.8) | (5.9) | (33.8) | (-33.8) | | |

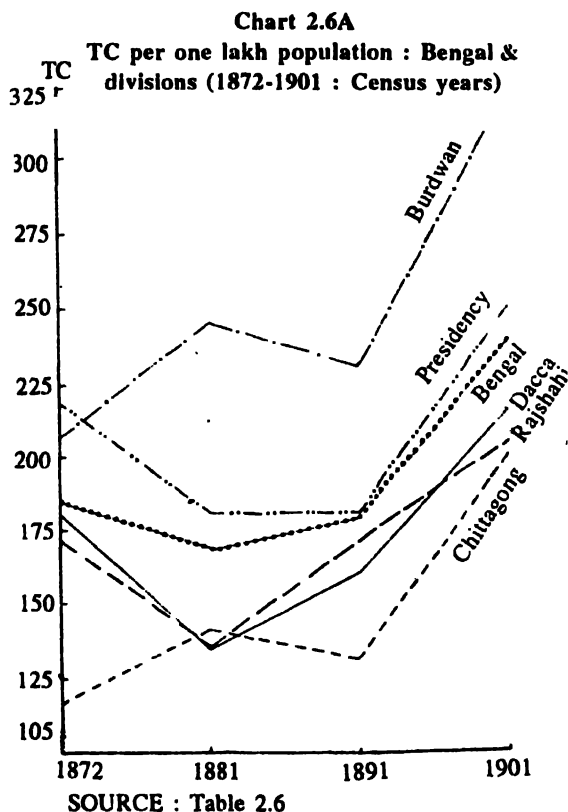
Note : (i) Figures in brackets show inter-census variation (%)

(ii) From 1905 to the end of our period (i.e. 1912), the Bengal crime returns showed not cases reported but 'true cases investigated' and as such 1911 TC figures are not strictly comparable to pre-1905 TC figures.

Sources : Census Reports and BPARs for relevant years.

The following significant points emerge from the preceding Table 2.6 and chart 2.6A taken together :Though the thirty-year period

(1872-1901) saw a 29 percent growth in criminality expressed as TC per one lakh population in Bengal, the real growth would be higher, 1872 itself having been a high crime year. No comparison has been made with 1870 because of the lack of reliable population data prior to 1872. Also, there is no way of knowing how the Bengal situation compares with that of the other provinces of India since relevant statistics have not yet been computed for these regions.



The average *annual* growth rate of TC for Bengal (almost 1%) can likewise be deemed to have been larger if 1870 could be taken as a base year. Even the figure of 1% suggests that the average annual rate of increase of TC was marginally higher than the concurrent population growth rate (less than one percent). Part of the explanation for the comparatively high TC growth rate for Burdwan division (2.1% per year)

can perhaps be found in the influx of migrant labourers in the wake of the significant increase in coal mining, railway construction and jute manufacture in different districts of this division during this period. An even higher average annual growth rate (2.5% per year) for the Chittagong division can perhaps be ascribed to a real growth in TC. The average annual percentage change in the remaining three divisions were, more or less, at par with the population growth rate.

In 1888 the Government of India undertook a study of the comparative crime situation in the major provinces of British India between 1875 and 1888. The Government found that there had been an overall increase of 18% in serious crime. The study further revealed that though the number of persons charged with serious crimes had increased by 79%, the percentage of persons convicted to persons tried had fallen from 63.2 to 32.2. However, whereas convictions were obtained in 45.1% of the true cases of serious crime in 1875, this had gone down to 35.5% in 1886.³ Compared to this somewhat dismal all-India picture, Bengal situation looked brighter. During this same period crime had decreased in Bengal. Again, the percentage of convictions to persons tried in serious crime had not diminished. In sharp contrast to the all-India average, the percentage of conviction to true cases had also improved in Bengal.⁴ All these official findings might be taken to mean that either the population of Bengal was less crime prone or the criminal administration in Bengal was more effective in this regard.

Dearth of readily usable historical crime data at the sub-national level provides only a limited scope for comparing the Bengal crime situation with other parts of India. However, when we make an inter-provincial comparison in terms of TC- population, TC-police and police-population ratios on the basis of available data, a few interesting aspects of the Bengal crime situation come to light. Referring to Bengal, Government sources comment : " There is no province in which the work of the police is more difficult; there is none in which the light of public criticism is more fierce. Yet this is the province which is the most under-policed in all India."⁵ In 1899, for example, while the average number of cases handled annually by an investigating officer in Madras, Bombay, Punjab and North-Western provinces was 27, 12, 28, and 20 respectively, their counterpart in Bengal had to enquire into 40 cases and thus face a much heavier workload.⁶ This pressure on the Bengal police is also highlighted by the following table which shows that at least till the end of the nineteenth century, Bengal was acutely under-policed and yet it had a relatively low TC-population ratio.

TABLE 2.7
TC-population, TC-police and police-population ratios in selected
provinces of British India (1890 and 1900)

| | 1890 | | | 1900 | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | TC per 1000 po- pulation | TC per police- man | Popula- tion per police- man | TC per 1000 popu- lation | TC per police- man | Popula- tion per police- man |
| NWP&Oudh | 4.7 | 6.2 | 1328 | 3.6 | 4.7 | 1333 |
| Bombay & | | | | | | |
| Sindh | 2.6 | 2.1 | 826 | 2.4 | 2.1 | 912 |
| Madras | 4.0 | 6.3 | 591 | 3.2 | 5.0 | 1572 |
| Punjab | 4.2 | 3.9 | 933 | 3.9 | 3.9 | 1024 |
| Central Provinces | 2.7 | 2.9 | 1122 | 2.2 | 2.7 | 1251 |
| Lower Provinces | | | | | | |
| of Bengal | 1.8 | 5.1 | 2821 | 2.1 | 5.9 | 2881 |
| Bengal (26 districts) | 1.8 | 5.4 | 3039 | 2.4 | 7.0 | 2980 |

Source : Police Administration Reports of the Provinces concerned (relevant years).

III

Since the introduction of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) on 1 January 1862, cognisable crimes have generally been categorised under the following six classes in the annual police administration reports on the basis of the IPC classification : Class I consists of 'offences against the state, public tranquility, safety and justice' (e.g. offences relating to coins, stamps, government promissory notes, rioting, unlawful assembly etc.) whereas Class II included 'serious offences against person' (e.g. murder, rape, grievous hurt, kidnapping, abduction etc.). Class III comprised of 'serious offences against person and property or against property only' (e.g. dacoity, robbery, burglary/lurking house trespass, house breaking etc.) and Class IV meant 'minor violence against person' (e.g. wrongful restraint, rash act causing hurt etc.). 'Minor offences against property' (e.g. theft, criminal breach of trust, cheating etc.) were categorised as Class V and offences other than the above (e.g. public nuisance, offences

under local and special laws declared to be cognisable) came under Class VI.

Instead of the above complicated legal categorisation of the Penal Code, a more purposeful method for our study will be to select for analysis the six major crimes which have dominated the Indian crime scene during the past two hundred years or so. These are Rioting (Rt), Murder (M), Dacoity (D), Robbery (R), Burglary (B) and Theft (T). A case of rape may be a 'serious' offence under the IPC—which it indeed is and must be viewed thus – but it is not necessarily a major crime in the overall volume and context of criminality. Conversely, a case of theft is not included in the official category of 'serious' offences but in its frequency and pervasiveness theft is perhaps *the* major crime in India. Moreover, theft and burglary (a slightly aggravated form of theft) taken together have always formed the bulk of cognisable crime in our country and affecting the largest number of common people.

An offence of rioting is committed when five or more persons form an unlawful assembly with some common object and also use force or violence for achieving that object (sec. 146 IPC). The offence of murder is committed when any act results in the death of a human being and such an act is committed with the intention to kill or to inflict bodily injury likely to cause death (secs. 299 and 300 IPC). Theft is the dishonest removal of another's property without the latter's consent (Sec. 378 IPC). When theft is committed in a dwelling place, it constitutes burglary (sec. 380 IPC). Robbery is an aggravated form of theft in the commission of which violence or the threat of violence is used (Sec. 390 IPC). When five or more persons conjointly commit or attempt to commit a robbery, the offence of dacoity takes place (Sec. 391 IPC).

There is another equally cogent reason for selecting the above six categories of crime: they can be grouped into two distinct combinations focussing on two important facets of crime, namely, crimes of violence ($Rt + M + D + R = RtMDR$) and crimes against property ($D + R + B + T = DRBT$).

The fact that these selected major crimes have, over the years, formed the major component of the total volume of crime (TC) in Bengal will be apparent from the following table. In order to make this statistical analysis more meaningful, these six categories of crime have been put under four sets of combinations: (a) Rioting and Murder (RtM): both involve a certain degree of usually premeditated violence, not necessarily connected with economic distress and similar other factors.

TABLE 2.8
Selected major crimes as % of TC: Bengal and divisions
(1865-1912 : Selected years)

| | 1865 | 1866 | 1872 | 1875 | 1881 | 1891 | 1897 | 1901 | 1909 | 1912 |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| BURDWAN | | | | | | | | | | |
| RiM | NA | 0.9 | 1.3 | 1.4 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 1.1 | 1.1 | 1.2 | 0.7 |
| DR | 2.3 | 4.5 | 1.5 | 0.8 | 0.4 | 0.3 | 0.6 | 0.6 | 0.6 | 0.6 |
| BT | 48.6 | 59.3 | 53.6 | 50.7 | 33.8 | 29.8 | 36.8 | 35.6 | 54.2 | 51.5 |
| DRBT | 51.0 | 63.8 | 55.1 | 51.3 | 34.2 | 30.1 | 37.4 | 36.2 | 54.8 | 52.1 |
| RiMDRBT | NA | 64.7 | 56.4 | 52.9 | 35.4 | 31.5 | 38.5 | 37.3 | 55.9 | 52.8 |
| PRESIDENCY | | | | | | | | | | |
| RiM | NA | 2.3 | 4.2 | 2.4 | 2.9 | 2.4 | 1.8 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 1.7 |
| DR | 1.1 | 1.8 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.8 | 0.6 |
| BT | 41.1 | 56.8 | 54.2 | 50.3 | 41.8 | 47.7 | 47.3 | 36.3 | 61.8 | 57.2 |
| DRBT | 42.0 | 58.7 | 54.8 | 50.8 | 42.1 | 48.1 | 47.7 | 36.7 | 62.6 | 57.8 |
| RiMDRBT | NA | 60.9 | 59.0 | 53.2 | 45.0 | 50.5 | 49.5 | 38.5 | 64.6 | 59.5 |
| RAJSHAHI | | | | | | | | | | |
| RiM | NA | 3.5 | 6.7 | 3.0 | 0.2 | 2.3 | 1.6 | 2.1 | 3.1 | 1.6 |
| DR | 1.2 | 1.9 | 1.4 | 1.1 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 0.9 | 0.5 | 1.2 | 0.6 |
| BT | 42.4 | 63.4 | 49.9 | 51.8 | 47.3 | 56.4 | 55.4 | 43.9 | 84.1 | 77.0 |
| DRBT | 44.0 | 65.3 | 51.3 | 53.0 | 47.9 | 57.1 | 56.3 | 44.4 | 85.3 | 77.6 |
| RiMDRBT | NA | 68.8 | 58.0 | 56.0 | 48.1 | 59.4 | 57.9 | 46.5 | 83.4 | 79.2 |
| DACCA | | | | | | | | | | |
| RiM | NA | 3.4 | 7.6 | 5.1 | 4.0 | 3.8 | 1.9 | 2.3 | 4.1 | 2.4 |
| DR | 7.9 | 1.7 | 0.9 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.6 | 0.5 |
| BT | 27.4 | 47.5 | 33.0 | 40.9 | 36.2 | 43.5 | 41.2 | 40.0 | 78.3 | 73.3 |
| DRBT | 35.0 | 49.2 | 34.0 | 41.1 | 36.5 | 43.8 | 41.4 | 40.2 | 78.9 | 73.8 |
| RiMDRBT | NA | 52.7 | 41.6 | 46.2 | 40.5 | 47.6 | 43.3 | 42.5 | 73.0 | 76.3 |
| CHITTAGONG | | | | | | | | | | |
| RiM | NA | 4.6 | 8.0 | 6.3 | 6.1 | 3.4 | 1.3 | 2.7 | 3.7 | 1.7 |
| DR | 1.3 | 1.9 | 0.7 | 0.4 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.4 |
| BT | 35.0 | 47.6 | 41.1 | 34.0 | 33.6 | 36.8 | 28.7 | 28.1 | 68.4 | 72.3 |
| DRBT | 36.3 | 49.5 | 41.8 | 34.4 | 33.8 | 37.0 | 28.9 | 28.2 | 68.7 | 72.7 |
| RiMDRBT | NA | 54.1 | 49.8 | 40.7 | 40.0 | 40.4 | 30.2 | 30.9 | 72.4 | 74.4 |
| BENGAL | | | | | | | | | | |
| RiM | NA | 2.4 | 5.1 | 3.2 | 2.8 | 2.5 | 1.5 | 1.9 | 2.6 | 1.6 |
| DR | 3.0 | 2.7 | 1.1 | 0.6 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0.3 | 0.7 | 0.5 |
| BT | 39.4 | 57.1 | 47.7 | 47.4 | 38.7 | 43.2 | 42.8 | 37.6 | 68.0 | 64.6 |
| DRBT | 42.5 | 59.8 | 48.8 | 48.0 | 39.0 | 43.6 | 42.3 | 37.9 | 68.7 | 65.1 |
| RiMDRBT | NA | 62.2 | 53.8 | 51.2 | 41.8 | 46.1 | 43.8 | 39.8 | 71.3 | 66.7 |

Source : Appendix II.

This is more so in the case of murder but its number being statistically a very minor variable for the purpose of identifying trends (even at divisional level), it has been grouped with the nearest 'cousine-in-crime', viz. rioting; both are unquestionably crimes of violence. (b) Dacoity and

Robbery (DR) are basically crimes against property but in their commission violence is involved in most cases. D and R are common factors – both for discussion of violent crimes and of property offences. Hence it is desirable, for our immediate purpose, to treat it as a borderline group, capable of being tagged on to Rt M to make a composite group of major crimes of violence (Rt MDR) and also to be combined with burglary and theft (BT) to represent the totality of the major property offences (DRBT). (c) Burglary and Theft (BT) are the two major offences against property and, taken together, form a significant part of the total volume of crime (TC). As such they have been set apart as a separate group so that we can examine their total impact on TC at different stages. (d) All the six major heads of crime selected by us will also be formed into a composite group of major crimes (Rt MDRBT) for the same reason as indicated in (c) above.

A close examination of the above table reveals that selected major crimes accounted for nearly 48% of TC. In calculating TC in all our tables, we have included in it even the so-called petty offences (i.e. Class VI offences including those under the local and special laws) which are declared cognisable under the law. In general, CI.VI offences constituted about 10- 20% of the TC, the annual average of such offences in our time series (1864-1912) being around 12% . If this aspect is kept in view, it will be clear that our selected six categories are not only significant as the major forms of crime per se but their actual combined (i.e.as RtMDRBT) impact on TC may be considerably higher than indicated by the figure of 48 percent reflected in the above table.

Secondly, major crimes formed an even larger proportion (69%) of total crime during the partition years (1905-1911). The incidence of RtMDRBT in cognisable crime assumed a very high magnitude during the first decade of the twentieth century compared to the previous forty years. It was particularly so during 1909 in all the five divisions. It is difficult to assess to what extent this pronounced incidence of RtMDRBT was due to the general disregard for law and the governmental authority, and the inevitable disorganisation in the criminal administration in the wake of the anti-partition agitation. However, that it was so at least to some extent finds support from two other readings of the above table :

(a) Except for Dacca and Chittagong divisions, there was a decline in RtMDRBT as % of TC in all the divisions in 1912 by which time the partition had been annulled resulting in an easing of the socio-political tensions; (b) even more specially, the two major groups of violent crime (RtM and DR) also registered a declining share in TC in 1912 in all the five divisions, only Chittagong having had a negligible increase in DR.

These two developments between 1909 and 1912 need not be taken as purely coincidental.

TABLE 2.9
Major crimes (RtMDRBT), violent crimes (RtMDR) and crimes against property (DRBT) per one lakh population :
Bengal and divisions (1872 - 1911/12 : census years)

| Division | | 1872 | 1881 | 1891 | 1901 | 1911 | 1912 |
|------------|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Burdwan | Pop.(lakh) | 76.0 | 73.9 | 76.9 | 82.4 | 84.7 | 84.7 |
| | RtMDR | 5.8 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 5.4 | 3.0 | 3.0 |
| | DRBT | 111.0 | 84.0 | 71.0 | 116.0 | 114.0 | 121.0 |
| | RtMDRBT | 113.2 | 86.4 | 74.0 | 119.4 | 115.6 | 123.0 |
| Presidency | Pop.(lakh) | 74.1 | 81.9 | 85.2 | 89.7 | 94.2 | 94.2 |
| | RtMDR | 10.6 | 6.9 | 4.9 | 5.8 | 4.1 | 4.0 |
| | DRBT | 119.0 | 76.0 | 86.0 | 91.0 | 99.0 | 98.0 |
| | RtMDRBT | 128.7 | 80.9 | 90.7 | 95.8 | 102.1 | 100.0 |
| Rajshahi | Pop.(lakh) | 80.5 | 84.4 | 88.4 | 93.9 | 101.7 | 101.7 |
| | RtMDR | 13.8 | 3.8 | 5.0 | 5.3 | 4.0 | 3.0 |
| | DRBT | 88.0 | 65.0 | 97.0 | 90.0 | 111.0 | 112.0 |
| | RtMDRBT | 99.4 | 67.9 | 101.2 | 94.7 | 114.1 | 115.0 |
| Dacca | Pop.(lakh) | 75.6 | 86.7 | 98.0 | 107.4 | 119.6 | 119.6 |
| | RtMDR | 15.3 | 5.8 | 6.5 | 5.4 | 4.4 | 4.0 |
| | DRBT | 61.0 | 49.0 | 70.0 | 86.0 | 107.0 | 107.0 |
| | RtMDRBT | 75.0 | 54.3 | 76.0 | 91.4 | 110.6 | 110.0 |
| Chittagong | Pop.(lakh) | 34.9 | 36.2 | 42.5 | 48.0 | 54.7 | 54.7 |
| | RtMDR | 10.1 | 8.9 | 4.6 | 5.7 | 3.1 | 2.2 |
| | DRBT | 48.0 | 48.0 | 48.0 | 61.0 | 75.0 | 76.0 |
| | RtMDRBT | 57.8 | 56.2 | 52.4 | 61.6 | 77.0 | 78.0 |
| Bengal | Pop.(lakh) | 341.2 | 363.2 | 391.0 | 421.5 | 454.9 | 454.9 |
| | RtMDR | 11.3 | 5.2 | 5.1 | 5.5 | 3.8 | 3.0 |
| | DRBT | 90.0 | 66.0 | 77.0 | 90.0 | 104.0 | 105.0 |
| | RtMDRBT | 99.2 | 70.2 | 81.9 | 95.1 | 106.5 | 108.0 |

Source : Appendix II and relevant Census Reports.

Thirdly, the property crimes (especially BT) have generally maintained a high level vis-a-vis TC throughout the period. The DRBT component of TC was predictably high in the famine year of 1866 in the affected Burdwan division (63.8%). It was surprisingly high in that year in the

unaffected Rajshahi division also (65.3%). Perhaps this was not unusual in view of the fact that property offences in Rajshahi division generally maintained, throughout our period, a high correlation with TC compared to the other divisions.

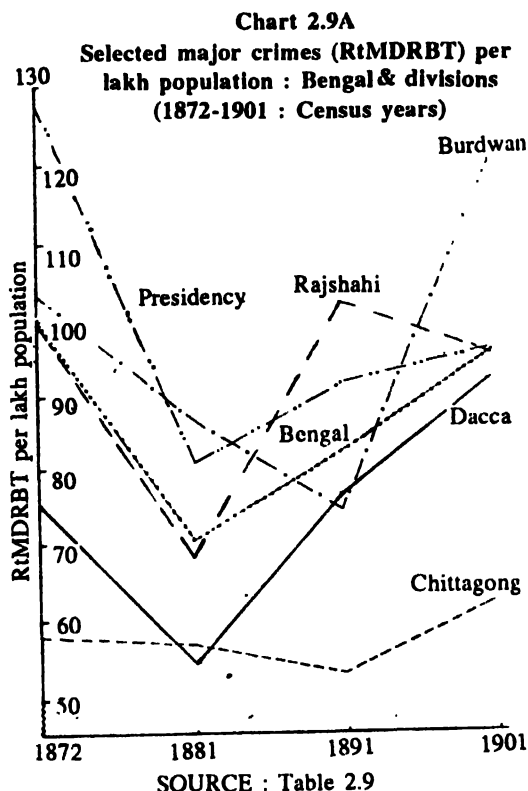
Certain aspects of the major crimes, especially the trend of the major crimes of violence and crimes against property, can best be analysed in terms of their relationship to population. With the help of Table 2.9 and the graphs in chart 2.9A, we will bring out the behaviour pattern of the following groups of major crimes as related to population growth : (a) selected major crimes (RtMDRBT), (b) selected property offences (DRBT) and (c) selected violent crimes (RtMDR).

The principal findings can be conveniently analysed under three broad heads : (a) Selected major crimes (RtMDRBT) per lakh population registered a decline in Bengal (-4%) over the 29-year period (1872-1901). However insignificant this appears at first sight, the very fact that the major heads of crime taken together did not cross the 1872 line despite an approximately 23.5% increase in population suggests that the criminal administration machinery in Bengal had come of age and, in general, succeeded in containing the major manifestations of crime. At the divisional level, the long-term trends in major crimes (per lakh population) have been divergent – marginal changes took place in Burdwan, Rajshahi and Chittagong; Presidency had a decline by about 25% whereas Dacca had a 22% increase. The negative growth rate in Presidency is quite remarkable, for, it had a 21.08% increase in population during this period (1872-1901).

However, the figures for the years 1911 and 1912 for Bengal and all the divisions are on the higher side compared to those of the previous censal decades. We have to recall here that the crime figures of the years 1905 to 1912 were of 'true cases investigated' and not of all 'cases reported', the former being smaller than the latter. At times this difference may be as much as 18%.⁸ Taking such 'missing' figures into account, major crimes can reasonably be presumed to have registered a very significant growth during the 1905-1912 period, despite a superficially low TC - population ratio.

(b) Property offences (DRBT) per lakh population : At the all-Bengal plane, we get a 'no-change' situation between the two nodal years, viz. 1872 and 1901 – each having registered 90 cases of major property crimes per one lakh population. This is quite remarkable if we keep in view the extent of urbanisation, growth of industrial slums,

immigrant labourers and other allied problems – the factors commonly believed to be conducive to crime. The 1911 and 1912 figures for Bengal



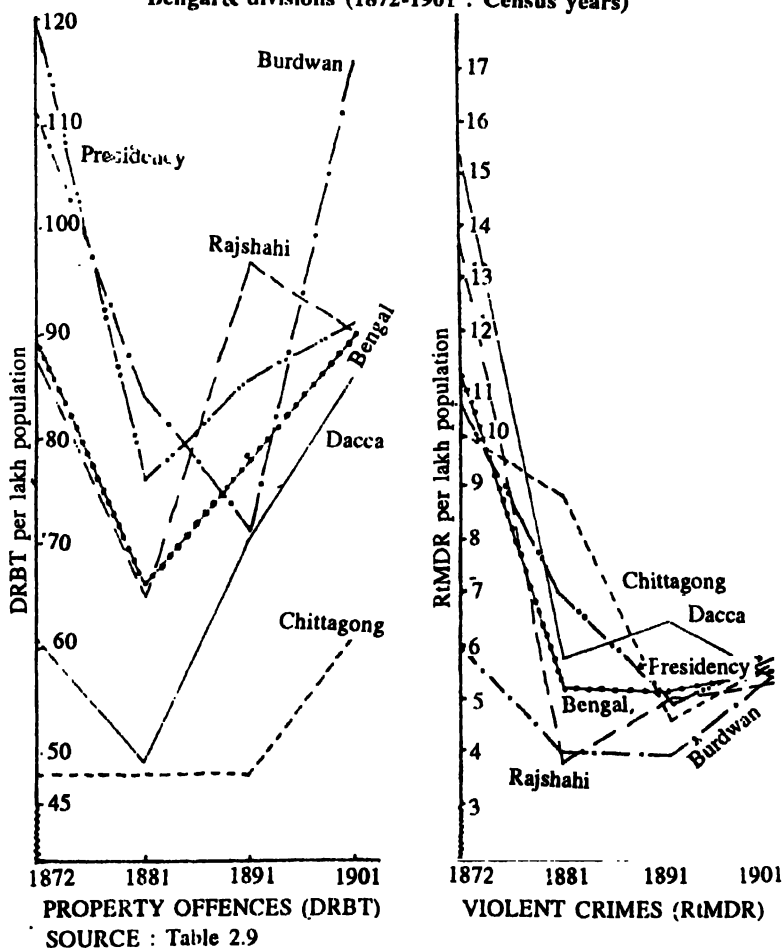
(104 and 105 per lakh of population respectively), inspite of being of true cases investigated only, show a sharply rising trend of property crimes during 1905-1912. One possible explanation for this rising trend has been offered earlier, viz. the impact of the anti-partition agitation. Another factor may well have been the rapidly rising price trend from 1905.⁹

At the regional level, the property offences per lakh population show considerable variations between 1872 and 1901. There was no marked fluctuation in Burdwan and Rajshahi divisions but Presidency had an approximately 23% decrease during this period while Dacca and Chittagong registered an increase of nearly 25% and 27% respectively. During the sixties, seventies and eighties of the nineteenth century,

Burdwan, Presidency and Rajshahi divisions each used to contribute the largest volume of property offences, whereas Dacca and Chittagong had the least. From the early nineties Dacca emerged in a big way in the property crime scene of Bengal, and by 1912 it contributed the largest number of property offences (12,741 in Dacca as against 11,430 in Rajshahi, 10,278 in Burdwan, 9,189 in Presidency and 4,170 in Chittagong).

Chart 2.9B

Property offences and violent crimes per lakh population :
Bengal & divisions (1872-1901 : Census years)



An explanation for this quantitative leap in Dacca division is called for. Firstly, we have already referred to the impact of the anti-partition agitation vis-a-vis the professional criminals, who are mostly property offenders; in the second place, Dacca registered the highest population growth between 1872 and 1901 (42.01%) compared to Burdwan's 8.36%, Presidency's 21.08%, Rajshahi's 16.53% and Chittagong's 27.41%. Apart from other socio-cultural implications of this population growth, it must have created considerable pressure on land and consequent displacement of marginal subsistence farmers with its chain reaction on erstwhile landless labourers. It may not be wide of the mark to presume that some segments of the last two categories of people were forced to the path of criminality for sheer subsistence. Thirdly, Dacca division, though usually under-policed compared to the other divisions, assumed a critical police-population ratio during the last two decades of the nineteenth century (see following table). Even if all other criminogenic factors were the same, which was not the case as we have briefly observed above, this exceedingly low police-population ratio itself can tilt the balance during periods of stress.

TABLE 2.10
Population per policeman : Bengal and divisions (1872-1911)

| Year | Burdwan | Presi- dency | Rajshahi | Dacca | Chitt- agong | Bengal & Wales* |
|------|---------|-----------------|----------|-------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1872 | 1877 | 1802 | 2841 | 3382 | 1942 | 2270 |
| 1881 | 2021 | 2316 | 3122 | 3925 | 2110 | 2627 |
| 1891 | 2199 | 2492 | 3282 | 4476 | 3992 | 3040 |
| 1901 | 2253 | 2344 | 3125 | 4320 | 4120 | 2981 |
| 1911 | 1923 | 2141 | 2673 | 3375 | 3591 | 2573 |

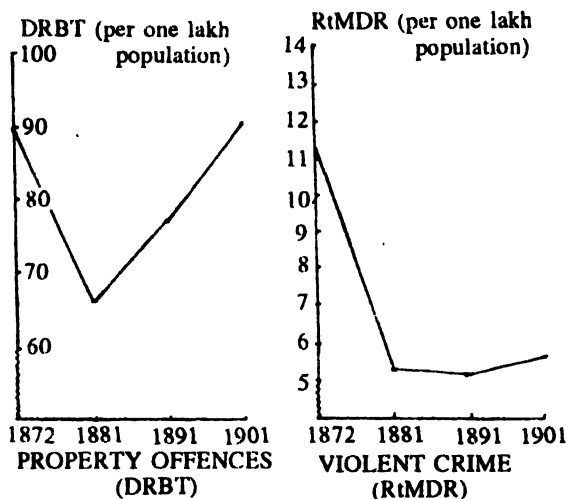
Source : Computed on the basis of population figures given in the Census Reports and actual police strength given in the BPAARs of relevant years.

* from *Crime Registration Reports* (UK), cited in Gatrell et al (eds.), *Crime and the law*, 1980, p.275.

(c) Violent crimes (RtMDR) per lakh population : Perhaps the most significant and surprising long-term trend to emerge from Table 2.9 relates to the major crimes involving violence. It is one of sharp decline in 1901 compared to 1872. This general trend is marked even during the 1911-12 period. It is well-known that substantial growth in urbanisation, immigration, industrialisation, railway and road communications had taken place in Bengal during this period (1872-1912). According to some

sociological and criminological view-points, the above growth factors bring in their train a degree of anomie, loosening of social control and intensification of social or class conflicts. The natural outcome is, therefore, an escalating level of violence. Such a traditional formulation obviously is not borne out by the Bengal crime scene covering a fairly long period of nearly forty years (1872-1912).

Chart 2.9C
Property offences and violent crimes :
Bengal (1872-1901 : Census Years)



SOURCE : Table 2.9

In their short-term manifestations, violent crime per unit of population fell sharply in 1881 in all the divisions though there was only a marginal decline in TC per unit of population (-8.8%) during the 1872-81 period. Between 1881 and 1891, however, their pattern altered at the divisional level. Presidency and Chittagong maintained the declining trend of the earlier decade but Rajshahi and Dacca showed an upswing. The second important feature of this decade (1881-1891) was that Burdwan, inspite of a substantial industrial growth in three of its districts (viz. Burdwan, Hooghly and Howrah), maintained a stable level of violent crime (4.0 per one lakh population).

In the next short-term phase (1891-1901), all the divisions, with the surprising exception of violence-prone Dacca, took an upward trend. This period was, to a large extent, marked by general economic distress, industrial unrest, communal conflicts, plague riots etc. Dacca division's unusual pattern was the result of a general reduction in the incidence of rioting and murder in all its districts. It is believed to have been due to some extent to a considerably augmented administrative vigilance culminating in the 'disarming' of its most violence-prone district of Bakarganj in 1896-97.

We may conclude this historical analysis of the general trends in crime by making a brief comparative review of the two principal groups of crime as enumerated per unit of population. The two sets of graphs in charts 2.9B and 2.9C will bring out the major contours of change:

(a) There was a clear drop in both property offences and violent crimes per lakh population in 1881, followed by continuous upswing in property offences. The graphs for property offences and violent crimes were at a high level in 1872 both for Bengal and its five divisions and all dropped to a significantly low level in 1881. Perhaps the uniformity ends here. The all-Bengal trend for the DRBT group after 1881 was a continuous uptrend, till in 1901 it caught up with the 1872 level. (Though not reflected in this chart but discussed earlier under property offences, this upward trend was sustained even upto the end of our period in 1912).

As against this, the violent crime (RtMDR) indicator for Bengal maintained the downward trend for another decade beyond 1881, and the rise thereafter was marginal. Thus, in 1901, the RtMDR level was far below that of 1872. In fact, between 1872 and 1901, the percentage variation for this indicator was a substantial decline of 51% against a no-change situation for property offences per unit of population.

(b) Also noteworthy are the divisional contrasts in these major crime categories as enumerated per unit of population. Burdwan has been high on property offences but low on violent crimes and the reverse is true of Chittagong. Dacca started with a low property crime and high violent crime profile but ended with a reversed pattern.

(c) Barring Burdwan (high) and Chittagong (low), the inter-divisional gaps in the proneness to property offences had considerably narrowed down in 1901. This convergence was specially evident in the arena of violent crimes, so that all the five divisions appeared to be at about the same level of vulnerability at the beginning of the twentieth century.

NOTES

1. For instance, Excise Law cases (e.g. illicit distillation of liquor) increased from a mere 923 in 1870 to 1727 in 1875, Salt and Customs cases rose from 985 in 1870 to 1405 in 1875, criminal breach of trust cases from 796 to 2536 and so on. Though these figures are for the entire LPB, these are indicative of the pattern in Bengal proper also.
2. Thorsten Sellin, "The significance of records of crime" in Radzinowicz and Wolfgang (eds.), *Crime and Justice*, Vol.I, New York, 1971, p.125.
3. GOI Home (Police) Progs/May 1890/115-240.
4. GOI Home (Police) Progs/May 1890/122-138, report from GOB dated 9 January 1890.
5. BPAAR 1900, p.17.
6. GOI Home (Police) ProgsA/March 1901/123-124, Appendix to Notes, p.2.
7. Such a methodology finds support in some recent historical studies on crime. See, for instance, Howard Zehr, *Crime and development of modern society: patterns of criminality in nineteenth century Germany and France*, London, 1976, p.16.
8. For instance, the percentage of cases investigated by police to cases reported in Bengal was 82.9 in 1911 and 87.9 in 1912. In 1911 this figure for United Provinces was only 52.2, for Bombay 95, for Punjab 98.5 and for Madras 98.7: BPAAR, 1912, p.28. For rioting in particular, this figure can be very high, e.g. only 50% of the rioting cases investigated in the East Bengal districts turned out to be true: EBPAAR, 1905, p.25.
9. Prices rose rapidly and continuously from 1905, the index for 1905 being 116 and for the following three years 129, 133 and 143. This rise was practically confined to foodgrains: *Prices and wages*, 31st issue, 1915, Appendix D, p.203f.

3 The Bengal Crime Scene: Some Special Features

No history of crime of any region can be deemed to be complete without an analysis of murder, popularly considered to be the most heinous of all crimes. In the course of our analysis we come across some striking regional characteristics associated with this crime. We begin this chapter, therefore, by discussing certain geo-physical phenomena which should open up new areas of study by social anthropologists. Secondly, the crime of dacoity (and its variant of river dacoity) has been the scourge of the Bengal countryside for centuries. We should, therefore, take note of this phenomenon for a proper understanding of the Bengal crime scene. Thirdly, we intend also to review briefly the impact of the process of industrialization on the crime situation, with special reference to the migrant labourers. In the preceding chapter we have attempted to highlight the significant long-term and short-term crime trends in Bengal. In the fourth place, therefore, we will seek to analyse some of the factors behind those trends. We would examine particularly the relationship between crime and scarcity, and as a part of this, a case study of Midnapore district will be presented.

II

Murder as a crime is generally regarded to be non-preventible. It is usually premeditated but at times the result of a grave and sudden provocation. In this sense the geographical spread of murder within a specific socio-cultural community, like that in Bengal, is expected to be

somewhat uniform. But a study of the annual crime returns of the Bengal districts from 1862 to 1912 belie any such generalisation. The Bengal Police Annual Administration Reports, the Bengal Criminal Justice Administration Reports and the Bengal Jail Administration Reports for the above 50-year period also speak of the relatively high incidence of murder in districts like Bakarganj, Midnapore, Mymensingh, 24-Parganas, Jessore etc. The general motives behind murders have, in various years, been ascribed to 'intrigues with women, domestic quarrels and land disputes'; within this general description, of course, were included murders for gain and revenge as well. There were quite a few cases of murder of women suspecting them to be witches but none of these happened in any of the 26 districts of Bengal proper.¹ Some cases of murder of prostitutes for their ornaments and other valuables were also noticed.

During this entire period of nearly half a century, the district which earned a great deal of notoriety for murder (and other violent crimes like rioting etc.) was Bakarganj. In 1889, the District Magistrate of Bakarganj seemed to have thrown up his hands in despair when he observed that "more than half the (Bakarganj murder) cases are connected with disputes about women; and as lust and jealousy are not restrainable by any means at the disposal of this department, I doubt if we can expect any improvement."² Likewise in 1895, Bakarganj was reported to be "more criminal than any district in the N.W.P. or Bengal" and it was "even worse than Peshawar" in this respect.³ The table below shows the Bakarganj position vis-a-vis the other four Bengal districts which also had been reporting a relatively high incidence of murder:

TABLE 3.1
Murder : annual average of cases (selected districts)

| | 1862-69 | 1870-79 | 1880-89 | 1890-99 | 1900-09 | 1862-1909 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|
| Bakarganj | 21 | 33 | 19 | 51 | 30 | 32 |
| Mymensingh | 24 | 16 | 16 | 22 | 27 | 22 |
| 24-Parganas | 13 | 15 | 14 | 15 | 21 | 16 |
| Midnapore | 14 | 14 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 14 |
| Jessore | 15 | 18 | 10 | 14 | 10 | 14 |
| Bengal (annual average of 26 districts) | 10 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 10 |

Source : Calculated on the basis of crime data extracted from the BPAARs.

It is apparent that the average annual incidence of murder in Bakarganj has been persistently very high – more than three times – compared to the annual average of a Bengal district. In his report for 1894, the IGP ascribed such an unusual high rate to the "operation of the Muhammadan laws of inheritance and the prevalence of inter-marriages among Bakarganj Musalmans", owing to which "subinfeudation has been carried out to an unheard-of extent"; the latter (i.e. subinfeudation), according to him, leading to land disputes was responsible for nearly one-third of the Bakarganj murders. Added to this was the indiscriminate issue of gun-licences in the district.⁴ It is not understood, however, how the IGP could cite the operation of the Muslim personal law relating to marriage and inheritance as a special feature of Bakarganj Muslims alone or how this could result in any greater degree of sub-infeudation of landholdings in this district than in other eastern Bengal districts which too had a predominantly Muslim population. The extent of sub-infeudation of lands in Bakarganj district was admittedly considerably greater compared to any other Bengal district, and this, in turn, was largely due to the complex process through which the land tenure system of this district was evolved.

The recurrence of crimes of violence despite various administrative measures was believed by the Government to be largely due to this defective land tenure system. This prompted the Government to order a detailed survey and settlement operation for this district 'as the means of restoring peace to the agricultural classes'. The Lt. Governor had proposed it because he considered that the only means of pacifying the district was to go to the root of the evil and by giving landlord, tenure-holder and raiyat a record of his rights "to remove the causa causans of the lawlessness and turbulence".⁵ The above operation lasted from 1900 to 1908 but failed to bring down the incidence of violent crimes. In 1908-12 there was an average of 39 murders and 88 riots each year compared with 40 murders and 147 riots in 1896-1900.

A perceptive sociological analysis of the factors behind such a peculiar trait is to be found in an 1871 report of the District Superintendent of Police, Bakarganj: "On asking the people (about murder being so common in this district), the only answer they give is that "the men of the Bhati Desh (tidal country) are very passionate". The S P averred that the men in the southern portion of Bakarganj were prone to violent and sudden outbursts of passion and attributed this disposition to freedom from all wholesome social restraints. He found that the

physical features of the district were very different and there were, strictly speaking, no villages. Each man built his homestead on his own land without any reference to his neighbours. The homesteads were far apart from each other, with dense plantations of coconut and betel nut surrounding each homestead. Families had, for this reason, little communication with each other and owing to numerous Khals or water courses and the swampy nature of the country, neighbourly visits were seldom exchanged. He believed this isolation of families had a great effect upon the character of the people. In the other districts, owing to the social relationships subsisting between families, domestic disputes were settled either by neighbours or by a Panchayet of the villagers, and a man found himself restrained in his temper and manners by the fact that the eyes of his neighbours were upon him. It is crime of this class that he found were so common in the district – "hasty and violent ebullitions of temper, leading to sudden murder".⁶ The above views were echoed by the IGP and the Bengal Government in the annual police administration report for 1871 as a general explanation for the crimes of violence in the 'tidal districts'⁷ of Bengal. These peculiarities in the formation of villages in Bakarganj, weak social bonds, sense of isolation among the inhabitants etc. were also observed by Beveridge.⁸ A somewhat similar trait, arising out of the geophysical environment in respect of Mymensingh district – the other district high on murder incidence – was suggested by an old resident of the district.⁹

It was the crime of dacoity (gang robbery), however, which dominated the Bengal crime scene till at least the end of the nineteenth century. Warren Hastings' "Plan for the establishment of foudars" in Bengal, dated 19 April 1774, spoke of the multitude of dacoits infesting the province, especially the areas around 'Cutwa (Katwa, later a sub-divisional headquarters in Burdwan district), Mirzanagar (in Jessore district) and Eachacanda'. Between 1772 and 1862, the districts which figured prominently as having been badly affected by gangs of dacoits were Burdwan, Midnapore, Hooghly, Nadia, Murshidabad, Jessore and 24-Parganas (including Barasat). Little official attention appears to have been paid throughout the nineteenth century to the problem of river dacoity though it was a speciality of the Bengal crime scene due to the extensive waterways of the Bengal rivers providing the major means of transport of people and merchandise.¹⁰

Within less than a year of the introduction of the new police system under the Police Act of 1861, the Rajshahi district administration made

a premature pronouncement that professional gangs of dacoits had disappeared from that district. An equally lofty claim was that "river dacoity in a great measure had ceased" in Bakarganj district.

Dacoity in Bengal, however, was not of a uniform nature. In the frontier districts of Chittagong and Tippera, it was more in the nature of border raids committed by "savage and uncivilized tribes, sheltered by inaccessible mountains and dense forest." At times they were impelled from their mountain fastnesses by the pangs of hunger and the hope of plunder in the peaceful villages of the plains. According to the Bengal Annual Administration Report (BAAR) for 1859-60, occasionally they were "urged on by a murderous thirst for human blood, with the sole object of obtaining (human) heads to place round the grave of some departed chieftain". The BAAR went on to say that the dacoits in Bengal were of a different category. They were reportedly indistinguishable from the common thief. Armed with clubs, swords and torches, they attacked a defenceless family or waylaid some unguarded boat. The officials were aware that gang robbery, if not checked, would bring discredit upon the Government. "But in this country crime is difficult to reach, more difficult still to eradicate".

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, and later too, the Bengal districts which had a high incidence of dacoity were Burdwan, Hooghly, Nadia, Midnapore, 24-Parganas (including Barasat), Murshidabad and Jessore — almost in that order. The following table of dacoity cases covering a period of sixty-six years (1847-1912) brings out some interesting aspects of the Bengal crime scene. It may, however, be mentioned for a better appreciation of this table that in early 1852 the

TABLE 3.2
Dacoity : annual average of cases in selected districts (1847-1912)

| | 1847- 1851 | 1852- 1864 | 1865- 1875 | 1876- 1899 | 1900- 1904 | 1905- 1912 | 1847- 1899 | 1900- 1912 |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Burdwan | 101 | 25 | 15 | 7 | 14 | 12 | 22 | 13 |
| Hooghly | 94 | 40 | 27 | 8 | 23 | 16 | 28 | 19 |
| Nadia | 91 | 23 | 8 | 3 | NA | 9 | 17 | - |
| Midnapore | 55 | 31 | 67 | 16 | 48 | 22 | 34 | 32 |
| 24-Parganas | 43 | 14 | 19 | 10 | 17 | 37 | 16 | 29 |
| Murshidabad | 25 | 38 | 25 | 5 | NA | 3 | 23 | - |
| Jessore | 25 | 31 | 7 | 6 | 9 | 7 | 17 | 8 |

Source : Calculated on the basis of data extracted from the BPAARs and the Bengal Dacoity Commissioner's Reports of the relevant years.

Bengal Government created a post of Commissioner for the Suppression of Dacoity having jurisdiction over the districts named in this table in addition to some other districts like Howrah, Bankura, Faridpore. This post was abolished towards the end of 1863.

It is evident from the above table that during the 1852-64 period, successive Dacoity Commissioners and their officers paid special attention to the districts of Burdwan, Nadia, and Hooghly.¹¹ The impact of such exertions is very clear from the considerable reduction in the incidence of dacoity in these districts in particular. Such reductions would appear to be all the more remarkable if the population growth in all these districts over the 1874-1912 period is taken into account. Two other factors which need to be borne in mind for a proper appreciation of the relatively small number of dacoity cases in the Bengal countryside are, firstly, the growing consciousness among the people reflected through wider coverage of crime by native newspapers; this not only reduced the possibilities of non-reporting of a serious crime like dacoity but also encouraged people's resistance to this type of crime. Secondly, during this period there was a substantial expansion of the institutions of criminal administration (e.g. establishment of police stations and outposts, sub-divisional courts etc); these too must have accounted for greater surveillance over dacoits and quicker dispensation of criminal justice than could be visualized during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Piracy on the Bengal rivers had existed for long. The Thagi and Dakaiti Department in Bengal extended its operations to the Bengal rivers in 1836 and found them infested by bands of fresh-water pirates having similar habits to those of the land thugs. Involvement of upcountry boatmen and criminals came to light in 1836 when the Bengal Thagi and Dakaiti Department arrested 160 of these criminals. The Madaripur waterways were at one time dominated by Namasudra gangs.

Between 1854 and 1855, four notorious dacoits of the Nadia Gwala gangs were arrested and interrogated by the Bengal Dacoity Commissioner.¹² The interrogation of these four dacoits alone revealed that they had committed 109 dacoities between 1849 and 1854 out of which almost 50% were river dacoities. The 1861 report of the Dacoity Commissioner mentioned a river dacoit Deegumber Mallah who confessed to the commission of at least eight dacoities on the Hooghly river between Calcutta and Chandernagore.

The Commissioner of Burdwan division frankly admitted that the Government and the local authorities had not the most remote notion of the extent to which river dacoities, occasionally attended with murder, were perpetrated and had prevailed for years. He also admitted that the police of the eastern districts, in the case of crime committed on the vast water tracts during the rainy season more especially, had absolutely no means at their disposal either of protection, prevention or detection, or indeed of information.

In 1863 a separate River Police unit under a Superintendent of Police was created to combat robberies and dacoities in the river Hooghly and in the Sunderban passages but it was abolished in 1866 as an economy measure. River piracy continued unabated right up to the end of the nineteenth century so much so that a well-known Bengali author Nabin Chandra Sen who began his career as a Deputy Magistrate in Bengal in 1869, wrote in his autobiography that at times it appeared to him as if Bengal was being revisited by the dreaded thuggee dacoits of yore. On the basis of reports received from the Divisional Commissioners, DIGs and S.Ps, the IGP drew the attention of the Government in 1867 to the considerable prevalence of river dacoity in Dacca division. He also submitted a scheme of river patrolling¹³ but nothing tangible came out of it. No concerted effort was made by the Bengal administration to check this continuing menace till 1899 when some of the native newspapers made a row over Government's inaction in this regard.¹⁴ In 1902 the IGP deputed two Inspectors on special duty for several months, with instructions to travel about the rivers of eastern Bengal to discover the extent of river crime not reported to the police. These Inspectors learnt of 70 unreported cases (including attempts) of 1900, 122 of 1901 and 136 of 1902. Two other Inspectors were also detailed to ascertain the extent of involvement of criminals from U.P. in the commission of river crime in Bengal. They, too, discovered that a large number of criminals from Mirzapur district of U.P. (especially belonging to a place called Kamassin in Mirzapore district) were involved.¹⁵

These disclosures led to the appointment of a joint team of police officers from U.P. and Bengal to make a detailed study of this problem.¹⁶ On-the-spot enquiries by this team, extending over several months, revealed that about 2500 habitual criminals had been coming down to Bengal every year from U.P., utilising rivers, travelling in large trading boats and under the guise of traders; of them nearly 1500 belonged to Mirzapur district alone. In addition to river crimes, they committed crimes on the land also.¹⁷

According to this enquiry, the worst affected areas were the Brahmaputra river between Chilmari in Rangpur and Goalpara in Assam; the Dhaleswari river from Tangail to Manickganj in Mymensingh and Dacca; the Padma river in the neighbourhood of Goalando, Faridpur and Madaripur; the intricate waterways in the neighbourhood of Bakarganj and Barisal, and the waterways between Godagery and Mathurabazar in Pabna.¹⁸

In addition to Mallahs (boatmen) from U.P., a large number of their counterparts from Bihar (especially from Gaya, Shahabad, Champaran, Saran, Patna, Darbhanga and Monghyr) were also found involved in river crimes. Some of them were suspected to be engaged in a flourishing opium smuggling trade between U.P. and Chittagong.¹⁹ It should not be concluded from what has been said above, however, that all the boatmen engaged in river traffic were criminals. Most were not involved in acts of crime

III

The socio-economic scenario of Bengal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was marked by two prominent features. The first was a growing tempo of construction (railways and roadways), mining (mainly coal) and manufacturing activity (mainly textiles) as illustrated by the rough indicators compiled in Table 3.3 below. Between 1890 and 1912, for example, railway mileage expanded from 11,000 to 28,000 while metalled roads increased from 32,000 to 42,000 miles. During the same period there was more than a threefold rise in the employment of jute mill workers (61,000 per day on average to 2,00,000 per day) while that of mine workers increased threefold (from 15,000 to 45,000).

The second feature was a continuous inflow of immigrants from outside Bengal, mainly from Bihar, UP and Orissa who migrated in sizeable numbers to the industrialised regions of Bengal. In 1901, for instance, Burdwan district reported a high concentration of migrant labour from Patna, Gaya, Shahabad , Monghyr and Chotanagpur in the mines and factories (iron works, paper mills, potteries) of Barakar-Kulti, Asansol and Raniganj.²⁰ Similarly, "the vast majority of factory operatives" were immigrants in Howrah district where 56 factories with 70,000 operatives were registered under the Factory Act in 1908.²¹

Table 3.4 below provides some district level migration figures representative of our period of study which bring out the conspicuous presence of immigrants as a special feature of the migration matrix.

TABLE 3.3
Growth of communications and industries in Bengal (1890 - 1912)

| | 1890 | 1900 | 1912 |
|--|--------|---------|-----------|
| 1. Railway mileage in northern and eastern Bengal | 4,000 | | 11,000 |
| 2. Railway mileage in southern and western Bengal | 7,000 | | 17,000 |
| 3. Metalled roads in northern and eastern Bengal | 2,000 | | 4,000 |
| 4. Metalled roads in southern and western Bengal | 30,000 | | 38,000 |
| 5. Number of collieries in Bengal | 56 | (1891) | 162 |
| 6. Number of coolies in collieries in Bengal | 15,000 | | 45,000 |
| 7. Number of jute mills in Bengal | 25 | | 58 |
| 8. Average daily number of jute mill workers in Bengal | 61,000 | | 2,00,000 |
| 9. Industrial work force (males) in Bengal | | 10 lakh | 11.3 lakh |
| 10. Population supported by transport and industry in Bengal | | 61.7 " | 75.3 " |

Sources • *Sl.Nos.1-4 K.L.Datta, *Enquiry into rise in prices in India*, Vol.I, Calcutta 1914, pp.76 & 79.
 " 5-6 J.C.K.Peterson, *Burdwan District Gazetteer*, 1910.
 " 7-8 COI, Vol.V, pt.I, p.79.
 " 9-10 R.Chattopadhyay, "Trend of industrialisation in Bengal, 1901-1931", *EPW*, 24 August 1981, p. 1425.

From our study of the general trends in crime in the previous chapter, we know that at the all-Bengal level during 1872-1901 (a) the annual rate of growth of TC was only marginally higher than the population growth rate, (b) there was no increase in property offences per unit of population and (c) there was considerable decline in violent crimes per unit of population. A pertinent point for consideration here is: to what

extent these macro-level trends hold good for the micro-level also, i.e., in the case of the specific regions which had experienced industrialisation and also immigration from outside Bengal.

TABLE 3.4
Immigrants into selected Bengal districts : 1891

| District | Total number of immigrants. | % of immigrants to total population | % of immigrants from outside Bengal to total immigrants |
|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 24 Parganas | 76,149 | 8.5 | 52.9 |
| Burdwan | 81,185 | 7.4 | 21.5 |
| Howrah | 63,918 | 15.3 | 42.0 |
| Hooghly | 83,902 | 9.3 | 16.0 |

Source : COI 1891, VOL.III, pp.84-99 (paras. 119-120, 127-131)

A succession of official reports, at least from the 1880s, frequently expressed concern at the increasing volume of crime, specially in areas attracting large number of migrant labourers from U.P. and Bihar, viz., in the coal mining belt of Asansol-Raniganj in Burdwan district and in the newly developed industrial centres of 24-Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly districts.²² The BPAAR for 1890 states that Burdwan district returned the highest number of burglary and theft cases (147) in the division, half of which were reported from Raniganj (Asansol) sub-division alone.²³

The fact that the crime level in a given region should rise with the passage of time is not unexpected, for there is usually a concurrent growth of population and, other things being equal, growing numbers will contribute to a rising crime graph. However, as we have already noticed, it is not the change in the absolute quantum of crime but the variation in the crime- population ratio (incidence of crime per unit of population) over time which is a more significant indicator of increase or decline in the incidence of crime. Whenever the rise or fall in this ratio is more than marginal, we have to look for contributory factors other than demographic change. Hence, to understand how growth in crime is related to industrial growth, we must, as a necessary prelude, study the variations in the crime-population ratio over a period of time in areas

known to have experienced accelerated industrial activity. So far as Bengal is concerned, the four districts of Burdwan, 24-Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly have traditionally been known for concentration of industry and it is to these districts that we now turn.

In this connection we may refer to an interesting study made by the then IGP of Bengal (L.F. Morshead) in 1910 which analysed, among other things, the impact of growing industrialisation and improved communication on the Bengal crime situation, specially in regard to the two major property offences usually committed by professional criminals. The IGP found that between 1891-94 and 1901-04 there was a noticeable increase in burglaries per unit of population in the above four industrialised districts of Bengal which prompted him to remark that the marked increase in crime in Burdwan between the first and the second period lends force to the presumption of the industrial influence.²⁴ Indeed the process of industrialisation can be reasonably expected to bring in its train certain genuine problems of policing and a rise in the level of crime in the industrial localities. Specially when the workforce has a large and persistent migrant content, the normal mechanisms of criminal intelligence and surveillance tend to become progressively inadequate and ineffective in the absence of strong remedial measures.

In an attempt to verify the impact of industrialisation on crime, Table 3.5 below compiles separately district level crime-population ratios for total crime (TC), violent crimes (RtMDR) and property offences (DRBT) at three points of time during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Beside the four industrialised districts, the inclusion of the two non-industrialised districts of Murshidabad and Midnapore affords a comparative perspective.

It will be seen on careful scrutiny that the Table does not suggest any clear and consistent crime pattern. Though the industrial districts by and large show rising TC per unit of population during 1881-1899, the non-industrialised districts of Murshidabad and Midnapore also share the same trend. Barring 24- Parganas and Murshidabad, violent crimes (RtMDR) per unit of population go up during this period but not always in a striking manner, except in the case of Howrah and Burdwan districts. One would expect to locate the most visible impact of industrialisation in DRBT figures per unit of population but here too the data give mixed signals, with Howrah and Hooghly along with Murshidabad actually showing a decline in this particular indicator.

TABLE 3.5
TC, RiMDR and DRBT per lakh population : selected Bengal districts (1881, 1891 and 1899)

| | | Presi- dency Divn. | 24-Pgs. | How- rah | Bur- dwan Divn. | Burd- wan | Hoog- hly | Midn- apore | Mursh- idabad |
|-------|------|--------------------------|---------|-------------|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|
| TC | 1881 | 180.0 | 292.9 | 672.7 | 244.5 | 179.8 | 431.4 | 172.1 | 235.5 |
| | 1891 | 179.7 | 224.0 | 532.2 | 234.7 | 340.3 | 247.9 | 153.4 | 214.9 |
| | 1899 | 248.0* | 283.0 | 757.1 | 320.3* | 325.2 | 339.6 | 258.3 | 254.4 |
| RiMDR | 1881 | 6.9 | 6.2 | 4.4 | 4.0 | 3.0 | 6.3 | 3.3 | 7.3 |
| | 1891 | 4.9 | 5.4 | 4.7 | 4.0 | 5.8 | 6.7 | 2.2 | 4.5 |
| | 1899 | 5.8* | 4.7 | 6.6 | 5.4* | 5.3 | 6.4 | 4.8 | 3.8 |
| DRBT | 1881 | 76.0 | 105.0 | 109.2 | 84.0 | 62.8 | 110.4 | 85.9 | 98.3 |
| | 1891 | 86.0 | 92.2 | 90.0 | 71.0 | 90.2 | 81.3 | 46.7 | 114.0 |
| | 1899 | 91.0* | 113.2 | 105.9 | 116.0* | 107.0 | 95.8 | 99.8 | 76.7 |

Note : * denotes the year 1901.

Source : Crime figures from BPAARs and population figures from Bengal Census Reports, relevant years.

There is, however, a valid reason behind the apparent ambiguity of district-level data as pointers to the expected role of industrial growth in aggravating crime. It must be realised that even within the limited area of a given district (such as 24-Parganas or Burdwan), the level of industrial concentration varied considerably and hence the expected spurt in delinquency would show up with some clarity only in the specific industrial locations within the district in the form of worsening crime-population ratios at much lower levels of disaggregation, ideally perhaps at the thana level. Unfortunately, even though population figures may be available at the desired level of disaggregation,²⁵ we have as yet no matching series of crime figures at the sub-district levels²⁶ and this obviously is a serious handicap in establishing any relationship between industrialisation and criminal behaviour.

Given the substantial migrant element in the population of the industrial pockets of Bengal, a moot question remains: did this element also play a prominent role in the criminal activity during the period under review? Though official reports of the 1890s refer to upcountrymen, migrant industrial workers and "exogenous wandering gangs" indulging in 'criminal practices', these provide no hard data establishing the criminal behaviour of these groups in more concrete terms (e.g., data on the actual nature and number of crimes committed by the various groups). Besides, the descriptive terms themselves give rise to a host of definitional problems: 'migrants' and 'industrial workers', for example,

are not necessarily synonymous and industrial workers, again, are not necessarily a homogeneous category for they include miners, mill hands and construction workers. Hence it becomes impossible to establish the specific identity of the various groups referred to in the official reports as the possible criminals. Thus in the absence of detailed data linking specific crimes to specific criminals, migrants' and industrial workers' involvement in crime in a major way during our period of study remains a probability rather than a proven fact.

IV

During the second half of the nineteenth century Bengal suffered three major instances of food scarcity and attendant economic distress: during 1866, 1873-74 and 1894-97. There is a fair amount of official correspondence and scholarly discussion on the usual issues that arise in the context of a famine, such as the extent of crop failure, movement of prices, organisation of famine relief etc. There is, however, no study which has as its main theme criminal behaviour during periods of economic distress in Bengal.

An analysis of available information unfolds two distinct aspects of the correlation between scarcity and crime which we propose to review in some detail : (i) scarcity in Bengal typically manifested itself in high prices and tended to breed high TC figures; (ii) while famine and dearth generated crisis responses ranging from vagrancy, migration, dependence on Government relief etc., certain sections of Bengal society also took recourse to a particular form of criminal activity, the objective of which was an immediate appeasement of hunger. Guided by the availability of evidence, much of the ensuing discussion necessarily focuses on the famine of 1866.

Apart from Balasore, Cuttack and Puri districts of Orissa, 'the blackest portion of the famine tract' in 1866 included the Midnapore district of Bengal. The other less severely affected Bengal districts were Bankura, Nadia and Hooghly. The failure of monsoon rains (June-August) during 1865 and again in 1866 resulted in an almost total failure of food crops — mainly rice — in Midnapore and the above Orissa districts. The following Table provides quarterly figures for average price of foodgrains and for crimes against property in the district of Balasore for the famine year 1866. It is evident that the sharp increases in the food prices

as compared to the average prices prevailing in the immediate pre-famine period were followed by a dramatic acceleration in crime.

TABLE 3.6
Average price of foodgrains and incidence of property offences in
Balasore District (Orissa) : 1863-65 and 1866

| | 1st quarter | | 2nd quarter | | 3rd quarter | | 4th quarter | |
|--|-------------|--------|-------------|--------|-------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| | a | b | a | b | a | b | a | b |
| | Rs. as | Rs. as | Rs. as | Rs. as | Rs. as | Rs. as | Rs. as | Rs. as |
| Average price of foodgrains. (Re. per maund) | 0 - 15 | 3 - 8 | 1 - 6 | 6 - 12 | 1 - 13 | 11 - 4 | 1 - 2 | 3 - 8 |
| Crimes against property | (a) | (b) | (a) | (b) | (a) | (b) | (a) | (b) |
| " Total for 1863 - 65 | 120 | 177 | 161 | 348 | 108 | 307 | 117 | 110 |
| " Total for 1866 | | | | | | | | |

Note : (i) a = 1863 - 65 (average); b = 1866.
(ii) one maund (md) = 40 seers = 37.50 kg.
one rupee (Rs.) = 16 annas (as)

Source : BPAAR 1866, Appendix I, p.28.

It has not been possible to construct an identical table of quarterly figures for Midnapore but in this district dacoity and robbery admittedly increased from the latter part of 1865 owing to the general distress and to a rumour, if not a prospect, of impending famine. Between November 1865 and April 1866, the district reported 67 dacoities. Of these cases, 50 were reported from the seven police stations of the famine-ravaged Jangal Mahal, the land of the Lodhas and the Bhumij. • •

As the scarcity condition lessened during 1867 and the price of common rice came down substantially, a remarkable downtrend took place in respect of crimes against property. The following table depicts this phenomenon in a telling manner though, as a sample study, it only covers six districts (3 of Bengal and 3 of Orissa) which were badly affected by the 1866 famine.

The extent of distress was somewhat less in Bengal during the 1873-74 dearth arising out of crop failure in a number of districts (e.g. Burdwan, Birbhum, Midnapore, Dinajpur, etc.).²⁶ Yet there was considerable increase in offences against property in most of these districts. Thus the largest number of dacoities in Burdwan district was

committed during the second and third quarters of 1874 when the scarcity was at its acutest in this district.²⁷

TABLE 3.7

Comparative figures of the price of common rice (seers per rupee) and property crimes (dacoity, burglary and theft) in selected districts: 1866 - 1867

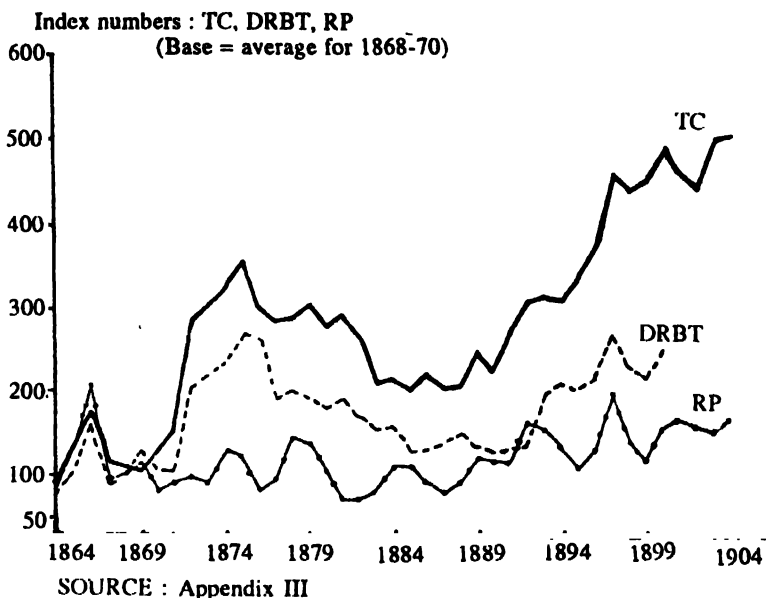
| District | Rice price | | Dacoity | | Burglary & Theft | |
|-----------|------------|------|---------|------|------------------|------|
| | 1866 | 1867 | 1866 | 1867 | 1866 | 1867 |
| Midnapore | 9.9 | 23.3 | 252 | 92 | 1045 | 458 |
| Bankura | 11.7 | 24.0 | 125 | 19 | 1315 | 840 |
| Rajshahi | 15.0 | 21.6 | 25 | 11 | 2137 | 1435 |
| Balasore | 14.0 | 22.0 | 149 | 17 | 625 | 263 |
| Cuttack | 7.0 | 14.0 | 163 | 17 | 945 | 887 |
| Puri | 8.3 | 13.1 | 51 | 3 | 1172 | 645 |

Sources : (a) Rice price : GOI, *Prices and wages in India*, 1898 (15th issue); p.4.
(b) Crime figures : BPAAR, 1867, p.76.

In Birbhum, too, dacoity increased from 21 in 1873 to 63 in 1874 and the majority of the cases took place during April and June when the scarcity was at its peak. The official report discloses that none of these cases was the work of professional criminals and that village chowkidars generally connived at and participated in these lootings ('gang robberies'). That these were crimes due to want was clear when there was a virtual cessation of such criminal incidents after the administration provided gratuitous grant of grain to the chowkidars and relief measures to others.²⁸

Midnapore district of Bengal may be taken as a case study of the nature of the close link between price trends and crime trends during 1864-1904. The following chart records the behaviour of three important variables for the above period which, for Bengal, was marked by at least three visitations of dearth. A crucial variable is RP which refers to the annual average retail price of common rice in Midnapore. The other two are TC and DRBT which refer, respectively, to the sum total of cognizable crime and crimes against property (viz. dacoity, robbery, burglary and theft) occurring in Midnapore in a given year. Each variable has been rendered in terms of index numbers so that the proportionate change periodically exhibited by each is easily visible and comparable. For the three sets of index numbers we have taken as base the triennial average of RP, TC and DRBT for the years 1868-1870 which may be considered a normal period. (The absolute magnitudes of RP, TC and DRBT are presented in Appendix III).

Chart 3A
Total cognisable crime (TC), property
offences (DRBT) and price of common
rice (RP) in Midnapore District
(1864-1904)



It is evident that the oscillations in rice prices on the one hand – an accepted indicator of the economic situation in Bengal – and in TC and DRBT on the other, tend to be synchronous as well as unidirectional throughout the four decades covered in the chart. Predictably both the volume of total cognizable crime (TC) and the volume of property offences (DRBT) climb to appreciably high levels when rice prices reach abnormal heights as in 1865-66, 1873-74 and 1896-97. At least in the case of Midnapore, then, price movements seem to have been followed closely by a changing volume of total cognizable crime as well as property offences.

We have already observed that in Midnapore dacoity and robbery had been increasing from the latter half of 1865. But in April 1866 the District Magistrate of Midnapore drew attention to a new trend of thefts from granaries becoming more frequent and one or two having been burnt down; he was alarmed that the crime was spreading towards the plains.²⁹ Looting of foodgrains was rampant in the Jangal Mahal segment of Midnapore, the seven police stations of this segment

accounting for almost 75% of the dacoity and robbery cases reported in the entire district between November 1865 and April 1866.³⁰

Again, according to the Superintendent of Police (SP), Bankura there were several instances in which large stores of grain were emptied and consumed by the famishing dacoits before the police could take action and that of the 130 cases of dacoity reported during the famine period, 83 were grain dacoities.³¹ There were also instances where inhabitants of three villages joined together to attack houses having stocks of grain, sometimes equipping themselves with baskets and bags for carrying the looted grain. Obviously, these dacoities were "committed by starving people chiefly for the purpose of obtaining food".³² In many places they scarcely took any precaution against detection and little or no trouble to escape after they were recognised; several confessed their crime freely before the sessions court, pleading starvation of whole families as an 'excuse for their offences'.

One part of 24-Parganas district (viz. Diamond Harbour subdivision in the south) also experienced great distress due to non-availability and high prices of foodgrains. Between Alipore (headquarters of 24-Parganas district and situated on the fringe of Calcutta) and Diamond Harbour (at a distance of about 30 miles from Calcutta) people were found to be deserting their homes and reduced to foraging for roots and herbs.³³ Plunder of grain and other violent crimes broke out in this tract in July-August 1866. As many as 43 cases of looting of foodgrains (*dhan* looting/dacoity) took place between May and August and these dacoities were chiefly owing to want of food in the southern parts of the district and were similar to grain dacoities in Midnapore, Balasore and Cuttack.³⁴ The Magistrate of 24-Parganas, like the District Judge of Midnapore, favoured stern measures to deal with such outbursts: "while the country was unsettled, it was absolutely necessary for the safety of the property that no sign should be allowed to appear that the offences would be looked upon with leniency."³⁵

There were extensive grain theft cases during the 1896-97 scarcity also. Almost one-third of the theft cases in Burdwan division and Jessore district and half of the theft cases in Dacca division were of this category.³⁶ Though instances of looting and forcible carrying away (i.e. technically speaking, dacoity) were not adequately chronicled in Government reports, it was admitted that in 1896 there occurred the largest number of cases of dacoity that have in any one year been registered in the LPB.³⁷ It is plausible that many of these property crimes of 1896-97 were committed with the object of procuring foodgrains;

reports from Bankura attributed the increase to the distress of poor people resulting from high prices and from Rajshahi to the effect of scarcity.

It would be reasonable to infer from the above account that those who committed crimes typical of a famine situation generally belonged to certain vulnerable strata of the rural society who depended on the harvest for their subsistence: agricultural labourers, small peasants and village artisans. When crops failed, there was little sustenance from the land for the agricultural labour and the petty farmer and the artisan's custom also dwindled because of shrinking agricultural incomes. It was observed in 1866 that the class of people who suffered most were vagrants (professional beggars), petty village artisans, agricultural labourers and subsistence farmers.³⁸ Though these classes have not specifically been mentioned in the official discourse on rising crimes in Midnapore during 1865-66, their involvement in famine-associated crimes become clear in the case of Balasore. We have seen earlier that this district, adjacent to Midnapore, registered a sharp rise in crime with the spiralling of food prices. It is known that dacoities during the 1866 famine in Balasore were committed mainly by the Pans and Kanders who had hardly any land of their own and used to eke out their living by working as agricultural labourers. They had no employment during the sowing and harvesting seasons of 1865 and 1866 and as such were deprived of their habitual payment in kind (i.e. paddy). At the same time they were totally reluctant to leave their homes in search of jobs elsewhere which they considered to be below their dignity: "let our sons die rather than become coolies".³⁹ Similarly, as the 1866 famine spread to Champaran district of Bihar, it was typically the petty farmer who found himself in dire straits and ultimately took to plunder of grain to ward off starvation. It is interesting to observe that sometimes they looked upon these exactions not as loot but rather as distress borrowing: as the famine increased in Champaran district, the lower order of ryots banded themselves together driven by want and sacked the golas (storage places) of grain, in a few instances actually giving their names and the quantity of grain each man took with a view to a settlement later.⁴⁰

NOTES

1. Such cases were reported from the tribal-majority districts of Bihar, viz. Santhal Parganas, Hazaribagh, Singhbhum and Palamau: BPAARs, 1904, p.24; 1905, p.24; 1906, p.22; 1908, pp. 21-22; 1909, p.20.

2. BPAAR, 1889, p.48.
3. BPAAR, 1895, p.61.
4. BPPAR, 1894, pp.62-63. Some corroboration of this view is found in J.C.Jack, *Bakarganj District Gazetteer*, 1918, p.96: "owing to the laws of inheritance most tenures are held by a large number of co-sharers amongst whom several may have sold their aliquot share to an outsider".
5. Jack, *Bakarganj survey and settlement report*, 1915, p.84.10 *ibid.*, p.84.
6. Report of J.H.Reilly, SP, Bakarganj, quoted in SAB, Vol..V, pp. 230-231.
7. GOB Judl.(Police)Res. dated 8 Oct. 1872 on the BPAAR, 1871, para 26. Also see pp.4-5 of the *Bengal Criminal Justice Administration Report for 1877: districts reporting most cases of —*
 - (a) Rioting (Bakarganj, Faridpur, Mymensingh, Dacca),
 - (b) False evidence (Bakarganj, Faridpur),
 - (c) Public Justice violations (Dacca, Mymensingh, Rajshahi),
 - (d) Murder (Bakarganj, Dacca, Mymensingh, Rajshahi),
 - (e) Culpable homicide (Bakarganj, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Dacca),
 - (f) Rape (Mymensingh, Tippera, Dacca),
 - (g) Dacoity (Bakarganj, Hooghly, Faridpur).
8. H.Beveridge, *The district of Bakarganj: its history and statistics*, London, 1876, pp.7, 211-17.
9. While interviewing a few old residents of these districts to understand the reasons behind such a streak of violence, one of them recalled a common saying of the area: *haor, jangal, mosher sing, aei tiney Mymensingh*, i.e., the three characteristics of Mymensingh are the extensive marshy lands, the long stretches of forest and the horns of wild buffaloes which were in abundance in these forests. The buffalo horn was symbolic of the streaks of obstinacy and fighting instinct. These geo-physical peculiarities of the terrain and the distinctive social traits of the people of Bakarganj and Mymensingh districts have also been highlighted in Hunter's *Statistical Account*, Vol. V, 1876; Jack's *Bakarganj District Gazetteer*, 1918, pp.4, 25, 37-40; Sachse's *Mymensingh District Gazetteer*, 1917, pp.3-6, 41-42.
10. For the years 1835 and 1836 for the whole of the LPB, only 13 and 4 cases respectively of river dacoity were reported out of a total of 259 and 204 dacoity cases: G.T.F.S. Barlow Speede, *The Criminal statistics of Bengal*, 1847. This shows the extent of non-reporting, especially of river crimes which persisted unchecked almost till the end of the nineteenth century.
11. GOB Selections, Nos. XVIII, XXVI, XXXI, XXXIV etc. Some accounts of this success story can be found from the writings of two police officers of this period: Sukumar Sen (ed.), *Bankaullar dafatir*. Calcutta, 1389 B.S. reprint (first published in 1896), and Girish Chandra Basu, *Sekaler darogar kahini*, Calcutta, 1983 reprint (first published in 1888).
12. *Selections from the confessions of dacoit approvers (Nuddea Gwala gangs)*, 1857.
13. GOB Judl. (Police) Progs. /March 1867/1-3.
14. *Charu Mihir* dt.13 February and 23 May 1899. *Sanjivani* dt. 7th September and 12 October 1899. In the GOB letter No.4359 J dt. 26 August 1904 to GOI it was admitted that after prolonged procrastination, the Govt.was stirred into some action as a result of the writings of the native newspapers: GOI Home (Police) Progs.A/November 1904/30.

15. GOI Home (Police) Progs.A/Nov. 1904/30, pp.394 and 400. Details are available in Record No.279/File No.CH 290-03 of 1903 in I.G., Bengal Records, Calcutta.
16. The team was headed by P.Bramley (Dist.Suptd.of Police, Benaras) and their report of 1904 contained detailed information regarding inter-provincial ramifications of river crimes in Bengal. This report will hereafter be referred to as the *Bramley Report*.
17. These figures are not given in the *Bramley Report* but are based on a preliminary note submitted by Bramley to GOB and referred to in GOB letter dt. 26 August 1904:GOI Home(Police) Progs A/Nov. 1904/39.
18. *Bramley Report*, paras 8 & 9, and App. para 11 of this Report.
19. *Bramley Report*, App.I, part A, para 16.
20. *Burdwan District Gazetteer*, 1910, p.43.
21. L.S.S.O 'Malley and Manmohan Chakravarti, *Howrah District Gazetteer*, 1909, p.105.
22. BPAAR, 1888, p.78 ("considerable increase in theft in 24-Parganas chiefly in Sadar and Barrackpore sub-divisions, where upcountry coolies work in the various mills and factories, and whose work was slack for a time and the workmen disengaged"); 1890, p.61; 1895, pp.50-51; 1896, pp.50, 69; 1898, p.56; 1903, p.25; 1904, p.26.
23. BPAAR 1890, p.61.
24. BPAAR, 1910, Appendix I.
25. For instance, in Asansol thana alone the population increased in 1901 by more than 31% since 1891 and by 130% since 1872 : *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol.IX, 1908,p.93.
26. A.P.MacDonnel, *Report on the foodgrain supply and statistical review of the relief operations in the distressed districts of Bihar and Bengal during the famine of 1873-74*, Calcutta 1876.
27. BPAAR 1874, p.54.
28. *Ibid.*, pp.54-55.
29. *Famine Commission Report*, 1867, Vol. I, District Narratives, p. 281.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid*, I, p.178.
32. *Ibid*, p.176.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 351, 358.
34. BPAAR 1866, App. I, pp.4-5.
35. *Famine Commission Report*, 1867, Vol.I, p.356.
36. BPAAR 1896, p.83.
37. *Ibid.*, p.68.
38. *Report of the Indian Famine Commission*, 1880, Appendix, Vol.III Part III, (Famine histories), p.70.
39. Report of the Collector, Balasore, *Famine Commission Report*, 1867 Vol.I, pp.76-77.
40. BPAAR 1866, Appendix I, p.151.

4 Socio-economic Offences

The historical analysis of the major categories of crime discussed in the two preceding chapters can at best bring out the broad contours of criminality of a particular society. For a fuller understanding of the dynamics of social deviance, therefore, this chapter attempts to introduce certain additional dimensions of deviant behaviour.

As a concomitant of the process of socio-economic evolution, certain customs and behaviour patterns get so distorted that they become objects of social repugnance. A stage is then reached when the moral authority of the society, or of the State, must assert itself to rectify such distortions. In this sense, a history of crime in Bengal is also inextricably linked with the history of Bengal society, its aberrations and imperfections, its changing value systems, and finally, its ability to cope with the emerging tensions in socio-economic relationships. In Bengal two such major upheavals had already taken place during the early part of the nineteenth century centering round the prevention of sati and child-marriage.

The battle-lines during the second half of the nineteenth century were neither so well-demarcated nor were the targets so prominent. There were, however, lingering nuances of offences affecting women and children which required concentrated attention. We shall shortly examine the magnitude of this problem in Bengal and the manner in which it was handled. We shall also show a new trend in the criminal jurisprudence in Bengal whereby new categories of offences were being created resulting primarily from an exotic, but not necessarily malevolent, transplantation of the western value system. Finally, though again as a continuum but with a widening horizon, we shall observe the

beginning of another serious aberration of modern human behaviour - the rise of the economic offenders.

II

There was a sharp break in the style of functioning of the Government of India and more specifically of the Government of Bengal after the 1857 Mutiny. The revolt marked the erosion of the moral basis of Bentinck's reforms, especially its underlying principle of co-operation between the British and the Indian middle class. "The new spirit was cold, bureaucratic, optimistic and racially arrogant... . The principles were to be English principles and only English principles."¹ The subsequent decades were to witness unabashed assertion of the rulers' value system leading to creation of new categories of crimes including socio-economic offences.

One can cite here a few illustrations of this change towards administration of criminal justice including crime and criminals. The hardening administrative attitude was amply manifest in its treatment of the criminal gangs, generally known in the official discourse as the 'criminal tribes'. Successive colonial administrators in India from Warren Hastings down to Bentinck had been speaking about the scourge of Indian criminal gangs with hereditary criminal traits. Severe anti-crime measures and special operations (e.g. by Sleeman during 1830s and early 1840s against the Thugs and Dakaits) were being launched from time to time. But it was not before the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 that certain social groups were sought to be dubbed as 'criminal tribes' and brought under restrictive, punitive and legal compulsions. The arrogance of the new era was quite clear in Stephen's (Law Member of the Governor General's Council) observations while introducing the Criminal Tribes Bill: "It means a tribe whose ancestors were criminals from time immemorial, who are destined by the usage of caste to commit crimes, and whose descendants will be offenders against Law, until the whole tribe is exterminated or accounted for in the manner of the Thugs... . Reform is impossible, for it is his trade, his caste, I may say, his religion to commit crime."²

The Indian Penal Code, the substantive law relating to crime, is a classic example of the assertion of the western value system in the sphere of codified law in India. Prior to its introduction in 1860, the English

criminal law, as modified by several Acts³ was administered in the presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras; in the mofussil, the courts were principally guided by the Mohammedan criminal law as modified by several Regulations passed by local governments. To bring about uniformity, the first Indian Law Commission (presided over by Macaulay with Macleod, Anderson and Millet as members) drafted the Indian Penal Code and submitted it to the Governor-General's (GG's) Council in 1837. It was then circulated among the Judges and the Law Advisers of the Government. In April 1845 another Law Commission was appointed to revise the original draft and the reports of this latter Commission were also submitted in two parts in 1846 and 1847. The Code so revised remained pigeonholed for another nine years and presented to the Legislative Council in 1856 but was finally brought on the statute book on 6 October 1860 superseding all previous rules, regulations and orders on criminal law in India.⁴ Thus the administrative hesitancy in totally replacing the confusing maze of Mohammedan criminal law and hundreds of Regulations, rules and orders for modifying and administering these laws between 1772 and 1852 was overcome only after the Mutiny.⁵

Besides giving precise connotations to the traditional types of crime like murder, dacoity, robbery, burglary, theft, etc. the new Code touched upon a very large arena of anti-social behaviour. Many of the codified offences constituting such behaviour were of social and economic significance. In fact, a whole chapter of the I.P.C. was devoted to defining and prescribing punishments for "offences affecting the public health, safety, convenience, decency and morals"⁶; another specified "offences relating to religion",⁷ and a third one, those "relating to marriage".⁸ The object and the content of these legal provisions were undoubtedly progressive; so were the provisions relating to weights and measures, trade marks etc. The moot point is, however, that an extensive gamut of crimes was created in one sweep, largely fashioned on the English principles of jurisprudence.⁹

The trend towards increasingly restrictive and regulatory legislation continued unabated throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and even thereafter, and in their wake new offences continued to spring up.¹⁰ At times there was a convergence of indigenous and ruling class value systems (for instance, on issues like toutting for prostitution, singing obscene songs or uttering obscene words in public).¹¹ Some of the habits and practices, though viewed with disfavour by local inhabitants, were

not considered repugnant enough by the native population to call for categorisation as acts of offence in the legal sense (e.g. committing nuisance in public places); other habits like bathing in public places, begging alms etc. were neither considered immoral nor objectionable. But all these practices were considered by the ruling class to be offensive enough to call for legal intervention, and thus the process of new categorisation of crime went ahead. This also had the effect of creating a relationship of conflict between the enforcement agency (primarily the police) and the local populace.¹²

It may perhaps be mentioned in this connection that the ruling class did not display the same degree of steadfastness – an "aggressive, no-nonsense" posture – in certain other areas of socio-economic aberrations where the interests of the ruling group were involved. Thus, child labour was freely resorted to and largely encouraged in the jute mills around Calcutta¹³ nor was anything done to punish the European planters in spite of their known atrocities against, and ruthless exploitation of indentured labourers in the north Bengal tea gardens.

III

Infanticide is the murder of a newborn child by the parents or with their consent. This practice of infanticide, especially female infanticide attracted the attention of the East India Company when its wide prevalence was detected in the Benaras (Oudh) areas in 1789. Sir John Shore highlighted it in his presidential address to the Asiatic Society in 1794. This problem was thereafter brought out in the Parliamentary Papers on 'Infanticide in India' in 1824, 1828 and 1843, finally resulting in the appointment of W.B. Moore by the Government of India as the Infanticide Commissioner in 1855.

Available evidence indicated widespread prevalence of female infanticide in parts of North-Western Provinces, Oudh, Punjab and Kathiawar regions. William Sleeman noticed this practice among the Rajputs of Oudh in which women also participated. He found that hardly any Rajput family was free from this evil practice. He ascribed this brutal habit to a strange insensitivity to the feelings of others; being the dominant class in Oudh, the Rajputs could trivialize the opinion of others with impunity.¹⁴ A report prepared in 1868 at the behest of the Punjab Government by Pandit Motilal Kathju, Extra Assistant Commissioner

and Mir Munshi of the Punjab Government further emphasised the prevalence of this practice among the Rajputs. Kathju, however, believed that far from being a general practice among all Rajput families, female infanticide was confined to a small portion only of certain Rajput tribes where this depravity had been sanctified into a hallowed tradition. "People in these families now practise this crime because their forefathers did so, and for no other reason."¹⁵ In common with Sleeman, Kathju also contradicted the notion that mothers were opposed to the practice. In fact he cited some instances of allied objectionable customs prevalent among the women of Punjab to prove his contention.

The official attitude tended to be cautious in dealing with this problem, more so in the wake of the 1857 uprising. It was felt that any coercive measure beyond mere moral persuasion might involve "interference with the privacy of races, who are at the same time the most jealous on such subjects, and the most martial in the country", and that utmost caution must be necessary lest officers acting with honest zeal should bring about "political inconveniences which should be avoided". The administrators were quite clear that the practice of female infanticide resulted "solely and entirely from the expense of providing for the marriage of girls of high or peculiar caste, and that to the diminution of such expenses our efforts should mainly be directed."¹⁶

In 1870, the Government of India forwarded to the local Governments a Minute recorded by the Lt. Governor of Punjab on the Memorandum of Pandit Motilal Kathju. On the basis of reports obtained from Divisional Commissioners, the Bengal Government informed the Government of India that "female infanticide was not practised in any part of the Lower Provinces of Bengal."¹⁷ It is somewhat difficult, however, to agree with the observation of the Government of Bengal that the practice of female infanticide, so widely prevalent in many other parts of India, was totally non-existent in Bengal (LPB). So far as Bengal proper is concerned, there might be two possible explanations for so significant a phenomenon as the absence of female infanticide, or at least its decidedly insignificant incidence. In the first place, the rigidity of intercaste hypergamous groups, as depicted in the Risley model,¹⁸ could not have existed in Bengal to the extent that it did, and does exist even now, in certain other parts of India, keeping in view the existence of an enlightened Bengali middle class and the social reform movements experienced in Bengal including abolition of sati, widow remarriage, female education etc. Another probable reason is the practice of

Kulinism,¹⁹ under which it was considered to be a great honour for a family to get its daughter married to a Kulin even if the latter was much advanced in age compared to the girl and was already 'married' to a very large number of wives. In other words, viewed in the context of the predisposing factors of female infanticide, Kulinism in Bengal may have provided a safety valve and an outlet for the marriage of girls for whom an ideal match could not be procured otherwise. However, this is an issue which would call for special attention by social anthropologists to arrive at a more definite conclusion.

Though female infanticide as a specific crime was conspicuous by its absence in Bengal, at least on official records, infanticide per se was not. This is corroborated by two sets of statistics that we could construct: (a) the number of cases of women committing infanticide and (b) the cases of murder of infants by their mothers. However, the comparatively small number of such infanticide cases in Bengal Presidency as a whole and in the Bengal proper districts in particular suggests that this crime did not assume very serious proportions in Bengal at least for the period for which data are available, i.e., 1875 onwards.

The province-wise conviction figures relating to women found guilty of infanticide shown in Table 4.1 below also provide ample evidence that the incidence of infanticide by women was much less in the Bengal Presidency compared to the other major provinces:

TABLE 4.1
Number of cases in which women were found guilty
of infanticide between 1876 and 1881

| Province | No. of cases ending in conviction | No. of cases in which sentences were remitted or reduced by the local Government * |
|----------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Madras | 56 | 24 |
| Bombay | 57 ** | 19 |
| N.W.P | 109 | 41 |
| Oudh | 60 | 18 |
| Bengal | 21 | 7 |
| C.P. | 21 | 7 |
| Punjab | 18 | 9 |

Source : GOI Home (Judl.) Progs. A/Oct. 1882/Nos. 202-232.

** Bombay figures are of women killing their illegitimate offspring only.

Selecting some years at random, it has been found that in LPB the murder of infants by their mother was not insignificant – 14 in 1882, 15

in 1884, 12 in 1888, 11 in 1890, 20 each in 1895 and 1900, 23 in 1901 and 21 in 1904. In Bengal proper, however, the figure was as low as 4 in 1912. Leaving aside the cases for 1912, the one hundred and thirtysix cases of infanticide during the selected years between 1882 and 1904 present an interesting geographical distribution : Saran district contributed the highest number of such cases (34), followed by Sahabad (10), Puri (9), Gaya (8) and Cuttack (6); Muzaffarpur, Champaran and 24-Parganas districts reported 5 cases each. (It may be noted that the districts of Saran, Sahabad and Gaya in Bihar, and Cuttack in Orissa were also the areas of high incidence of death of infants by wilful exposure.) The other affected districts reported less than 5 cases each. Some of the Bengal districts (e.g. Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura, Jessore, Nadia, Tripura, Noakhali, etc.) appear to have remained largely free from this evil.

The figure for the Bengal districts in 1912 was 4, and this has generally been the average number of cases in the Bengal districts even during the 1882 - 1904 period. At the same time it should be understood that the incidence of a crime of this nature, generally considered as being shrouded in the privacy of an Indian home, is bound to have been much higher than the reported cases would ever indicate. Let us take even one specific variety of this offence. It was common knowledge even during the forties of the present century that the throwing of a first-born child in the holy sangam during the Gangasagar mela (around mid-January every year) as a sacrifice was not infrequent.²⁰ But there is no report about any such case in the entire series of BPAARs from 1863 to 1912. Obviously there was a conspiracy of silence among the family members and village elders; if by any chance the village chaukidars and the police station staff got scent of it, buying their silence too was an acknowledged fact, a *pén* picture of which can be seen in Lal Behari Day's story of Govinda Samanta.²¹

Though a variety of predisposing factors were at play including domestic tensions and physical handicaps faced by the mother, the majority of the cases arose out of the fear of social ostracism associated with the stigma of giving birth to an illegitimate child. Notions of legitimacy of birth are apt to vary between different social groups but recorded instances show that the stigma of giving birth to a child out of wedlock was usually so severe that it impelled even the mother or her near relations to destroy the evidence of such illegitimate birth and this fear was equally strong among Hindus (both high caste and low caste) and Muslims.²²

It was reported in 1882 that a Muslim girl of Chittagong was pregnant at the time of her marriage and she destroyed the new-born girl. In the following year several instances came to light. A widow of the Chandal caste in Khulna destroyed her illegitimate new-born baby with the help of her mother to avoid social stigma. In Patna a widow threw away her illegitimate child in the river. Two cases in Sonthal Parganas and one in Cuttack were reported where widow mothers took recourse to infanticide to avoid social ostracism. In a slightly different case, a woman of Rangpore quarrelled with her husband, cut her own throat and that of her son; the latter died but the woman survived, was tried and sentenced to transportation for life. A Muslim woman was tried in Champaran for deserting her illegitimate child; pending trial, the child was made over to her while she was in jail, and she strangled it to death.

In 1884 in Midnapore a widow gave birth to twins, killed them by wringing their neck and disposed of their bodies. Three cases were reported from Puri in which the mothers destroyed their new-born babies for fear of being thrown out of caste. In another case of the same year callousness and passivity of the villagers in 24-Parganas came out in sharp relief. A new-born baby was placed in a bowl and abandoned near a tank; its cries attracted the attention of a man who was at work in an adjacent field. For once the villagers thought of informing the police but did nothing to save the child who died by the time the police arrived. In another instance a woman in Mymensingh cut the throat of her two children and then attempted to commit suicide; she was hanged on conviction. A woman in Rajshahi district drowned one of her twin infants and stated in her initial confession that she had done so because 'she did not feel equal to nursing both'.

Turning to a somewhat later period one finds that this trend persisted. Out of 21 infanticide cases of LPB in 1904, ten related to destruction of new-born babies as they were considered illegitimate. Similar instances of destruction of infants to avoid social stigma were reported in 1912 too.

The specific instances of infanticide cited in the annual police administration reports do not include any case relating to any well-to-do family. This, however, should not lead to the presumption that such cases were rare among them. There are two reasonable explanations for such absence of recorded instances of infanticide in affluent families: Firstly, by virtue of their social and financial power, instances of infanticide among them could be successfully hushed up; secondly, when faced with

a situation of extra-marital pregnancy, such families used to send off the pregnant women (widow or otherwise) to Benaras or other distant places either for abortion or for delivery. Since the poorer sections of the people could not afford the expenses involved in this, the official statistics were mostly cognisant of their involvement in infanticide. This finds corroboration in the reminiscences of a mid-nineteenth century daroga of Bengal named Bankaulla.²³

The present study could not establish satisfactory grounds for the noticeable regional variations in the incidence of infanticide, both at the intra-provincial and inter-provincial levels. Perhaps deeper sociological probings are called for to unearth the potent causative factors and to assess whether differing notions of illegitimacy as between different regions or other social or economic variables were responsible for such disparate patterns.

The crime of infanticide was not viewed as a serious problem in the criminal administration of Bengal till 1882. Nevertheless, this social evil was practised in other forms in Bengal as elsewhere. Thus, abortion, concealment of birth and wilful exposure of newborn infants resulting in death were not infrequent. On the basis of a random selection, again, it was found that between 1866 and 1900, an average of 143 cases of fatal wilful exposure of infants were reported in LPB. The districts of Bengal proper reported 35 such cases during 1912. It may be said in general that the incidence of this category of offences against newborn children were more acute in some of the Bihar districts than in those of Bengal or Orissa. Of the Bihar districts, the worst affected were Shahabad (12 cases in 1866, 20 cases in 1872, 19 in 1873, 15 in 1880), Saran (28 cases in 1866, 19 in 1872, 18 in 1873, 12 in 1880), Trihut (18 cases in 1866, 13 in 1872, 7 in 1873), Gaya (9 each in 1872, 1873 and 1880), Patna (12 cases in 1866, 7 each in 1872 and 1873, 12 in 1880). The district of Cuttack in Orissa also reported a fairly large number of such cases (10 in 1872, 16 in 1873 and 8 in 1880). Of the Bengal districts, Midnapore reported 7 cases in 1866, 10 cases in 1872, 4 in 1873 and 8 in 1875; the other Bengal districts generally had 5 or fewer cases annually.

The BPAAR (LPB) for 1870, commenting on the relatively small number of reported cases of exposure of infants or concealment of birth, stated that the apparent smallness of the above number compared with the returns of other provinces could only be explained by the fact that in lower Bengal abortion was practised to a very large extent but the police

were prohibited by administrative fiat from enquiring into such cases even when death ensued. Such a restraint on police investigation was perhaps due to the apprehension of misuse of police power in this sensitive area. Cases of exposure of infants continued to be unusually prevalent in the Patna Division in 1885 – 61 cases to the provincial total of 109. The Government sought to explain this phenomenon in terms of the 'general poverty of the population'. However, the available data do not indicate the sex of the victims nor do we know the caste or economic condition of the families in which these incidents took place. In the absence of such details, it cannot be said with any definiteness whether poverty, fear of social ostracism or any other factor was the prime motive behind these offences.

Exploitation of minor children and women for prostitution and other immoral purposes is an age-old global problem. For our limited objective, we will bring out the extent of its prevalence in the Lower Provinces of Bengal over a 38-year period (1866- 1904). In 1866, the Bengal districts reported 52 cases (Mymensingh 12, Nadia 7, Dacca 6, Pabna 5, Rajshahi 4 and Faridpur 3) followed by 19 from Orissa (Cuttack leading with 18 cases) and 9 from Bihar, making a total of 80 cases. 30 cases each were reported in L.P.B in 1870 and 1872 and 23 in 1871. The cases went up to 60 in 1873 but decreased relatively during 1874 (49) and 1875 (38). 1880 had 17 and 1890 registered 13 cases only. They, however, went up again during 1900 (29) and 1904 (23). Of the Bengal districts, Mymensingh, Bakarganj, Rangpur, Dacca and a few other districts in eastern Bengal were reporting such cases.

The significant points which emerge even from a partial sampling of the data are, firstly, that this form of crime was prevalent more in the Bengal and Orissa districts than in the Bihar districts – though the latter region showed a fairly high incidence of the other types of offences affecting infants, viz. infanticide and death by wilful exposure. In the second place, the eastern Bengal districts were more prone to this form of crime than the central or western districts of Bengal. Thirdly, the less prosperous districts were the least affected by this evil even during the worst days of the 1866 famine or the severe scarcity period of 1873-75. Thus, Bankura and Birbhum, two of the economically backward districts, did not have any case of selling of a minor for immoral purposes even during the 1866 famine.

It is on record, however, that the desertion of children assumed a fairly serious proportion during the distress of 1866.²⁴ That these were

cases of 'distress sale' of children by some starving families and not necessarily for immoral purposes, is borne out by the report of the Inspector General of Police on Nadia district in particular: in the early part of 1866 there was reason to suppose that the crime of selling children for the purpose of prostitution was, under the influence of distress and scarcity of food, very prevalent. Careful enquiry and the evidence elicited at numerous prosecutions showed this belief to be erroneous. That many children were transferred by their parents to the protection of others during the months of severest want and high prices of food, was certain; but save in a few exceptional cases, the transfers were not criminal transactions made with a view to ultimate immoral purposes.²⁵

Reports from Bihar and Orissa revealed distressing facts. While submitting a statement showing the number of orphans dependent on public or private charity in the wake of the 1866 famine, the Commissioner of Patna Division mentioned that there were no such orphans in Saran district because the children were invariably the first casualties of starvation.²⁶ Another interesting aspect was revealed from Cuttack. An Oriya journal mentioned in January 1867 that the prostitutes had done the society a good turn by securing and sheltering famished girls during the early stages of the distress at a time when no government assistance was forthcoming.²⁷ The fact that even towards the end of 1867 there were at least 200 female orphans under the protection of the prostitutes in the town of Cuttack was admitted in an official report.²⁸

Of all categories of crimes against women, rape is undoubtedly considered in all civilized societies to be the most repulsive and heinous. The criminologists are not unanimous as to what propels an offender of this type – uncontrolled animal instinct or psychopathic aberration or an aggression mania, or a combination of these. The official records and statistical returns in respect of this crime hardly lead us to any useful conclusion either regarding the motivation of the rapists or their age, class and religious composition. Likewise, we have no means of knowing much about similar details in respect of the victims. Only some scattered glimpses are available.

Closely linked to the sexual crime of rape is kidnapping, abduction and enticing away of girls and married women. Like the former type of crime, abduction and enticement were resorted to either by an individual operating singly or in gangs. Rape, abduction and enticement appeared to be more rampant in some of the eastern districts than elsewhere in Bengal. Thus William Hunter writing about the district of Bakarganj in

1877 observed that a very large number of cases were instituted for enticing away married women; there was no offence of more constant occurrence in the district than this, a circumstance which he explained in various ways : early marriages, domestic quarrels arising out of the peculiar constitution of the Musalman household, pecuniary temptations, strong passion and love of intrigue combined to make breaches of the marriage law of very common occurrence. In this class of offences, the Musalmans were almost always involved and "such cases are for the most part unknown amongst the Hindus, except those of the very lowest class," observed Hunter.²⁹

He made a similar assertion about the district of Mymensingh where charges of adultery and abduction were numerous and that these cases, "with scarcely an exception, occur among Mohammedans of the lower class."³⁰

Nearly twentytwo years later, i.e. in 1899, we find that a large number of newspapers in Bengal were clamouring for stern action by the Government to put down recurring incidents of outrages against women such as forcible abduction and rape in Mymensingh district.³¹ On the basis of an analysis of such cases by a newspaper of Bengal, the Weekly Report on the Native Newspapers of Bengal stated that most of these cases took place among the poor Musalmans: "The marriage tie is not very strong among them, and marriage is cheap and easy. Let a Musalman carry off one's wife and the latter will, in his turn, carry off another's wife and forget his former wife" and that in some cases "a Musalman, seeing it difficult to get back his abducted wife, would settle the matter with the offender by taking money from him as damages."³²

Some of the other districts like Murshidabad, Faridpore and Khulna were also ridden with this form of crime in an endemic form during 1899.³³ Almost every week during 1899, one or the other of the newspapers in Bengal were highlighting such crimes against women in Mymensingh. Of the 230 cases of rape in the entire Lower Provinces of Bengal during this year, Dacca division alone reported 72 cases, 49 of which occurred in Mymensingh district. From a number of incidents of Mymensingh district cited by the newspapers, it appears that the majority of the victims were Hindu women and the offenders mostly belonged to the Muslim community (RNNB 1899, pp. 367, 385, 409, 427-28 etc.). It should not be presumed from these reports that there was any dearth of rapists and seducers among the upper class Hindus and Muslims of Mymensingh district; in fact some of the newspaper reports make it clear

that the *bhadralok* category was not quite innocent (RNNB, 1899, pp. 509 ff.). However, in response to the persistent public outcry, the Bengal Government was forced to detail five Special Inspectors to Mymensingh to investigate the cases.³⁴

One noticeable feature of public reaction in the shape of newspaper reports during 1899 on the above issue of offences against women was that, almost universally, the zamindars were blamed for their failure to keep in check the bad characters in their respective estates. *Charu Mihir* in its issue of 27 February 1899 stated that though the power and prestige of the zamindars were as great as ever, widespread absentee landlordism afforded enough opportunities to the subordinate staff to foment trouble and encourage crime which suited their selfish ends. *Sanjivani*, however, cited in its 11 May 1899 issue an instance of rough-and-ready justice meted out by the gomosta of a zamindar which put a stop to such outrages in some parts of Mymensingh district. Thus when some boatmen committed outrage upon a helpless woman, he had the culprits brought before him and in the presence of their relations and villagers had nightsoil put into their mouth by way of punishment.

IV

Various malpractices in the course of trade and commerce, professions and public services have existed from time immemorial in all societies. In the Indian context, bribery, corruption, counterfeiting of coins, forgery, preparation of fraudulent deeds, cheating, adulteration of foodstuffs, manipulation of weights and measures, criminal breach of trust by public servants, bankers and merchants etc. as instances of economic offence were recognised as threats to the socio-economic health of the community as much by the *Arthashastra* and the *Ain-i-Akbari* as by the Indian Penal Code (1860).

We have faced some genuine difficulties in our attempt at projecting a reasonably adequate profile of the economic offences during our period. In the first place, disaggregated data for the districts of Bengal proper could not be located and hence we had to be satisfied with a general picture of the LBP as a whole. Secondly, there are hardly any details available in regard to offences which may be termed as economic offences. Thirdly, quite a few of these offences (e.g. cheating, criminal breach of trust etc.) can be either a

cognisable or a non-cognisable case, depending on the facts of each individual case, and such facts have not figured for the most part in available official records. Hence we thought of incorporating in Table 4.2 cases of both categories, the totality of which may represent the relative incidence of these offences.

TABLE 4.2
Incidence of economic offences in the Lower Provinces of Bengal :
1870 -1912 (selected years)

| | 1870 | 1875 | 1880 | 1885 | 1890 | 1895 | 1900 | 1904 | 1912* |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| A. Cognisable offences. | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Coins, Govt. stamps/notes etc. | 117 | 153 | 151 | 118 | 19 | 137 | 228 | 26 | 125 |
| 2. Criminal breach of Trust | 796 | 2536 | 1990 | 1751 | 1344 | 1217 | 3052 | 3055 | 726 |
| 3. Cheating | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | 411 | 601 | 448 |
| 4. Gambling Act | 46 | 119 | 143 | 103 | 169 | 185 | 110 | 116 | NA |
| 5. Excise Laws | 923 | 1727 | 3025 | 2429 | 3184 | 2573 | 1909 | 1850 | NA |
| 6. Salt & Custom Laws | 985 | 1405 | 1273 | 357 | 930 | 355 | 545 | 642 | NA |
| 7. Railway Laws | NA | 472 | 277 | 348 | 234 | 246 | 461 | 620 | NA |
| 8. Opium Act | — | — | NA | 609 | 499 | 714 | 395 | 315 | NA |
| 9. Criminal breach of trust by public servants, bankers, merchants, etc. | — | — | — | — | — | — | 148 | — | NA |
| B. Non-cognisable offences | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Fraudulent deeds etc. | NA | 1156 | 1492 | 1402 | 1492 | 975 | 1946 | 1370 | 700 |
| 2. Forgery | NA | 206 | 212 | 188 | 175 | 215 | 158 | 168 | 141 |
| 3. Weights & Measures | NA | 169 | 198 | 253 | 196 | 189 | 162 | 158 | 68 |
| 4. Trade Marks | NA | NA | 8 | 22 | 24 | 12 | 23 | 26 | 4 |
| 5. Cheating | NA | 1356 | 1708 | 1586 | 1304 | 1445 | 1523 | 1593 | 1617 |
| 6. Criminal misappropriation of property | NA | 913 | 888 | 861 | 637 | 602 | 563 | 532 | 494 |
| 7. Criminal breach of trust by public servants, bankers, merchants etc. | NA | 129 | 133 | 180 | 198 | 130 | — | — | NA |

Source : BPAARs.

* Figures for the year 1912 are of the 26 districts of Bengal proper.

Within the constraint of the above factors we will attempt to bring out principally two aspects : firstly, compared to other crimes, the volume of recorded/reported economic offences tends to fluctuate widely in response to social and governmental attitudes. Secondly, the few cases of white collar crime detected during the first decade of the twentieth century revealed for the first time the increasing involvement of people belonging to the upper social strata and quite often with wide inter-provincial ramifications.

In Table 4.2 a very tentative attempt has been made to bring into focus the well-recognised forms of unlawful acts which adversely affect the economic life of the community or of a segment of it. Simultaneously, one may also perhaps look at the incidence of such legal infractions as a reflection of the aberrations of the economic cycle of the period in question. Thus, it will be seen that around 1875 - a period of economic distress - a considerable increase in the various types of economic offences is noticeable.

At this stage perhaps a word of caution is necessary. It is generally recognised that a certain degree of variation in the size of recorded (reported) crime is attributable to the periodic bursts of activity on the part of law enforcement agencies due to administrative exigencies. Whereas in relation to traditional crime categories like murder, dacoity, robbery etc. its impact is generally marginal, in the area of socio-economic offences this can be quite substantial. For instance, public clamour about drunkenness resulting from illicit distillation of liquor may lead to a period of vigorous enforcement of the Excise laws; the outcome would be a considerable rise in the crop of Excise law cases, though it may not necessarily mean a rise in criminality in regard to that category of crime. Gambling, customs, railway and weights' and measures cases also may be deemed to be specially vulnerable to this type of fluctuation. Secondly, as expanding horizons of public morality and ruling class interests demand statutory recognition and protection, new categories of crime in the shape of socio-economic offences are created, resulting in an increase in the apparent volume of criminality. The Bengal Gambling Act of 1876, the Weights & Measures Act of 1871, the Excise Act of 1876, the Sea Customs Act and the Opium Act of 1878 are instances of this process, even though the three latter Acts were guided more by the exigencies of the colonial economic interests than anything else.

A case in point is the operation of the Excise laws. It has been a common practice among the economically depressed lower strata of

society including the tribal people in Bengal as elsewhere to consume home-made brews and intoxicants like *pachai* and *haria*, i.e. fermented coarse rice, millets or mohua. Such brews, though intoxicating, served as cheap nutrients for these people. Establishment of licensed country-liquor shops where intoxicants of other varieties were introduced, was not so much to cater to the needs of the people as to add to the sources of revenue for the government. Thus the administration gloated over the increase in excise revenue during 1875-76 as compared to the earlier scarcity years and felt quite satisfied that "convictions were obtained in several cases of illicit manufacture of country liquor in outlying thanas of Burdwan district."³⁵ Details are lacking, however, to identify the type or class of people thus penalised.

Similar was the case with the new laws relating to salt and forest lands/products. Extraction of salt from rocks and sea water has been providing gainful employment to the entire village community in certain areas from time immemorial. Regulatory forest laws also restricted the rights of the tribals and other indigent villagers and thereby forced at least some of them to the path of 'criminality' for sheer physical survival. Such widening of the economic activity of the Government also expanded the concept of criminality and brought within its purview acts which should not have been otherwise categorised as crime.

Basically every legal system is an index of the ideological perception of the ruling group or class. Nowhere is it more pronounced than in the arena of socio-economic legislation and its enforcement. It is not surprising, therefore, to observe that in the first relatively full-fledged crime return of the Lower Provinces of Bengal for the year 1866, only one category of cognisable economic offence — criminal breach of trust — finds place, and the total number of cases is the ridiculously low figure of 2.³⁶

The Bengal Act of 1897 "to suppress rain-gambling in common gaming houses" is an interesting case-study on official preception of public morality. Rain-gambling as a pastime was reportedly introduced in Calcutta by the Marwaris many years before 1897 and was freely indulged in by them in the Burra Bazar area of Calcutta where most of them lived.³⁷ For some years it was confined to one house, containing a large courtyard where the gamblers could assemble. Two more houses were subsequently opened. Each of the three establishments had their retinue of agents who registered bets on behalf of the proprietors charging them and the successful wagerers a commission of one pie and

one anna respectively on each rupee won. The bets were made on the occurrence of rain within a certain time, and they were registered three or four times daily. The proprietors of the establishments offered odds against rain and these depended chiefly on the state of the weather—ranging from level money to 2 to 1, 3 to 1, and sometimes as high as 50 to 1. Those who backed the rain did not win unless the rainfall sufficed to cause an overflow within a given time limit, from a small raised tank through a spout visible from the courtyard where the gamblers could assemble.

In course of time this practice attained a considerable magnitude and was deemed by the Bengal Government to be a public nuisance apart from being economically ruinous to many poor and middle class families.³⁸ The views expressed by the Lt. Governor of Bengal, A. Mackenzie, on the proposed legislation merit attention: "I am afraid I do not rise to a very great height of moral elevation in connection with this Bill... I am no believer in enforcing morality by legislation. I look upon this Bill simply as a measure of police. I have been convinced by the reports of the Commissioner of Police that the practice of rain-gambling has grown to the dimensions of a large and growing public nuisance. It is solely in that light that I approach the question." He observed that in most civilised countries common gambling houses were looked upon with disfavour and were suppressed by legislation; the mode in which this form of gambling was conducted in Burra Bazar had become so intolerable as to call for the intervention of the police.³⁹

But was the Government moved to action on the above issue by the purely altruistic motive of public weal? Perhaps it was. But could it be construed from a different angle that rain gambling enticed a large number of people who could otherwise have swelled the clientele of the monsoon horse races of the Royal Calcutta Turf Club (R.C.T.C.) which had a powerful lobby not only in the European mercantile community of Calcutta but also in the corridors of the Bengal Secretariat? Documentary evidence to support this possibility is not available but a reasonable suspicion of an R.C.T.C.—official axis behind the move to ban rain-gambling is apt to linger.⁴⁰

'White-collar' crime as a criminological concept was first introduced by Edwin H. Sutherland in 1939 and this was subsequently given a concrete shape in 1949.⁴¹ In his original formulation Sutherland used the term to refer to violation of legal codes in the course of occupational activity by persons who are respectable and of high social status, i.e.

persons used to clean white collared shirts as against the working classes wearing blue overalls. When, for instance, a professional man (e.g. a businessman or a trader, a company executive, a doctor or a lawyer) evades payment of income tax, or a public servant accepts bribe, he may be said to commit a white-collar crime though there is no such legal categorisation. Economic offences like smuggling, blackmarketeering, hoarding, food and drug adulteration, company frauds and forgeries etc. can be regarded as some of the species of white-collar crime.

No account of the history of economic offences and white collar criminals in Bengal during our period can be complete without at least a brief mention of a few cases. During 1904-05, the Bengal CID (Criminal Investigation Department) investigated a series of promissory note forgery cases involving the French Bank, the Bengal Bank (2 cases) and the Allahabad Bank. The gang comprised of about 14 persons including two who were residents of Benaras and Allahabad. All of them were educated; three were employees of the Bank of Bengal. The gang adopted an extremely ingenious modus operandi for forging currency and promissory notes and thereby defrauded the banks of considerable amounts between 1900 and 1904. Six of the accused persons remained untraced, one died in jail, one was granted a pardon for having made a full confession as an approver and five (including the three bank employees) were convicted with imprisonment ranging between five and ten years.⁴²

Bamapada Mukherjee was the son of a respectable resident of Serampore. At the age of 25 he incurred the displeasure of his father, was disinherited and turned out of the house. He then went to Nadia where the police suspected his involvement in several cases of drugging and robbing of prostitutes at Santipur and Krishnagar. Disappearing from Nadia, he surfaced at Goalundo in 1888 where he perpetrated a daring money-order fraud and was arrested but escaped from jail in 1888 during the trial of the case. He remained undetected till 1896 when he was arrested in U.P. and sentenced there in a railway receipt forgery case. In 1902 he was again arrested in Saran district (Bihar) in another railway receipt fraud case but absconded while on bail. Thereafter, in the guise sometimes of a Maratha merchant, sometimes as an upcountry trader or as a Bohra Mohammedan, he was successful in accomplishing no less than 22 swindles, thereby obtaining money amounting to more than Rs.20,000/-. He was finally nabbed by the joint efforts of the Bengal and Punjab CIDs in far-off Ratlam (Central Provinces, now in Rajasthan) on 3 November 1907.⁴³

Manmatha Nath Moitra, a relation of the wealthy Gossain family of Serampore (Hooghly) turned out to be the chief architect of a gang of notorious swindlers. He and his gang were involved in 17 cases of swindling between 1905 and 1908 but due to 'considerable influence', the cases ended in acquittal.⁴⁴

Ananda Mohan Roy was a 'well-connected zamindar, once in affluent circumstances', and a graduate of the Calcutta University. In April 1911, the Bengal CID raided his Tollygunge (Calcutta) house which resulted in the discovery of a large number of finished and half-finished 1000 Rupee forged currency notes along with a complete set of apparatus for manufacturing forged notes. During his trial, a plea of insanity was taken in his defence, which was accepted by the jury.⁴⁵

The above case-studies are illustrative of the emergence on the Bengal criminal scene of a new breed of offenders coming from the higher socio-economic strata even as the old-order lathial offenders, the dacoits and burglars and the low-caste criminal gangs continued their depredations though on a diminished scale.

NOTES

1. Michael Edwardes, *British India*, London, 1967, p.176.
2. Cited in the *Report of the U.P. Criminal Tribes Enquiry Committee*, 1948, p.9.
3. 9 Geo. IV, S. 74; Acts VII and XIX of 1837; Acts XXXI of 1838; Acts XXII and XXXI of 1839; Acts VII and X of 1844; Act XVI of 1852: Ratanlal and Dhirajlal, *The Indian Penal Code*, Bombay, 1987 (26th edn.), pp.lxxiif.
4. Ratanlal and Dhirajlal, op.cit. ; Hari Singh Gour, *The Penal Laws of India*, Vol.I, Allahabad, 1980, 9th edn., pp.14-15.
5. 675 Regulations were passed in Bengal for this purpose between 1793 and 1834, Bombay had 259 and Madras 250 during 1800 and 1834: Ratanlal and Dhirajlal, op.cit.
6. Ch.XIV of the I.P.C. on *OFFENCES AFFECTING THE PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, CONVENIENCE, DECENCY AND MORALS* included punitive provisions for public nuisance, negligent acts likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life; disobedience to quarantine rule; adulteration of food or drink intended for sale; adulteration of drugs; negligent conduct with respect to animals; sale of obscene books; obscene acts and songs etc.
7. Ch.XV of the I.P.C. on *OFFENCES RELATING TO RELIGION* providing punishments for injuring or defiling place of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class; deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings; disturbing religious assembly etc.

8. Ch.XX of the I.P.C. on *OFFENCES RELATING TO MARRIAGE*, like cohabitation caused by a man deceitfully inducing a belief of lawful marriage etc.
9. The draft I.P.C. as prepared by the first Law Commission under Macaulay relied heavily on English laws, Livingstone's Louisiana Code and the Code Napoleon.
10. For instance, certain provisions of the Police Act/1861, Bengal Gambling Act/1867, Arms Act/1878, Cattle Trespass Act/1878, Dramatic Performances Act/1876, Hackney Carriage Act/1879, Opium Act/1878, Post Offices Act/1898, Press and Registration of Books Act/1867, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act/1890, Railways Act/1890, Sarais Act/1867, Treasure Trove Act/1878 etc.
11. An editorial in *Sambad Prabhakar* dt.15.2.1264 (BS) highlighted the menace of prostitution and called for stringent measures for their regulation; : Benoy Ghosh (ed.and compiled), *Samaik patre Banglar samajchitra, 1840-1905*, Pt.I, Calcutta 1962, p.189.
12. *ibid.*, pp.185-188, containing a severe castigation of the Calcutta Police authorities for their zeal in taking legal action against persons easing themselves on the roadside and also against persons observing some of the *charak* practices, e.g.self-inflicted penances such as *banphore* (piercing the flesh with arrows), *kanta-jhap* (jumping on thorns), *kuul* (swinging) etc.
13. *Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission*, 1908, para 51, p 36.
14. W.H.Sleeman, *A journey through the Kingdom of Oude in 1849 50*, London, 1852, Vol.II, p.250.
15. GOI Home (Pub.) Progs.A/No.97. The Memorandum of Pandit Kathju is dated 23 December 1868.
16. GOI Home (Judl.) Progs./19 Feb. 1870/No.23, containing the views of G.Campbell, Chief Commissioner, Central Provinces, dated 18 January 1868.
17. GOB Judl. Progs./Oct.1870/ Nos.54-57, and GOI Home (Pub.) Progs.A/10 Dec. 1870/No.9.
18. H.H.Risley, *The people of India*, Calcutta, 1908, pp.158ff.
19. A *Kulin* literally means a high-caste family with ritually pure lineage. For a brief discussion on the practice of polygamy among the kulins in Bengal, see Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Norms of family life and personal morality among the Bengali Hindu elite, 1600-1350", in Rachel Baumer (ed.), *Aspects of Bengal history and society*, New Delhi, 1976, pp 17ff.
There does not appear to have been any detailed study so far about the extent of Kulinism in Bengal during our period. But the institution of Kulinism was applicable in Bengal to the upper caste Kayasthas like Bose, Ghosh, Mitra and Dutta besides the Brahmins. As such the overall impact of Kulinism on the middle class in Bengal could not have been very negligible.
20. B.S.Haikerwal, *Economic and social aspects of crime in India*, London, 1934, p.69. Rabindranath Tagore's poem 'Debaratras' contains the poignant tale of such a practice of child sacrifice, though in a slightly different context.
21. Lal Behari Day's *Bengal peasant life*, 1970 reprint, Calcutta, pp.122-23.
22. BPAARs 1882, 1883, 1888, 1890, 1900, 1901, 1904, 1912.
23. Bankaulla, *Bankaullar Daftar*, Calcutta, 1896 (1982 reprint), p.32.

24. It was mentioned in the Famine Report of 1867 that the number of orphaned or deserted children was extremely large; altogether 18,146 passed through the hands of the Famine Relief Committee alone: *Report of the Indian Famine Commission*, 1880, Appendix, Vol.III, Part III, p.63. For details regarding the number of inmates maintained in Government sponsored Foundling Asylums (at Tivoli Gardens and Mint Shed in Calcutta), Pauper Hospitals (at Calcutta and Howrah) and in famine relief centres in Bihar during 1866-67, see GOI Home (Pub.) Progs/March 1867/Nos.152, 171-73 and 176.
25. BPAAR, 1866, p 281.
26. Letter No.23C dt.2 March 1867 from J.W.Dalrymple, Commissioner, Patna Division to GOB: GOI Home(Pub.) Progs/March 1867/No.152, p.915.
27. *Utkal Dipika* (Oriya Weekly) dt. 12 January 1867.
28. Report of Kirkwood, O/C of Orissa famine relief, quoted in the *Report of the Indian Famine Commission*, 1880, vol.III, part III (Famine Histories), p.63. However, the Famine Relief Commissioner of Orissa (Malony) is believed to have tried to underplay the prevalence of this evil : op. cit., p.63.
29. W.W.Hunter, *A statistical account of Bengal*, Vol.V, 1877 p.232.
30. *ibid.*, p.468.
31. *Hitavadi* dt. 28 April 1899; *Charu Mihir* dt. 2 May 1899; *Prativashi* dt.8 May 1899; *Sanjivani* dt. 11 May 1899; *Charu Mihir* dt.23 May 1899; *Sanjivani* dt.1 June 1899; *Charu Mihir* dt.6 June 1899; *Hitavadi* dt.16 June & 14 July 1899; *Sanjivani* dt.12 Oct. 1899 etc. quoted in the *Report on the Native Newspapers of Bengal* (hereafter RNNB) for 1899, pp. 307, 310, 329, 367, 385, 409, 427-28, 509, 573 etc. Such outrages against women in Mymensingh district were quite rampant even in earlier years; see, for instance, RNNB 1897 (January-June).
32. RNNB 1899, p.573.
33. *ibid.*, pp.307, 509, 826.
34. BPAAR, 1899, p.61.
35. *Divisional Commissioner's Report, Burdwan*, 1875-76, p.16, para.20.
36. BPAAR, 1866, Appendix.
37. C.E.Buckland, *Bengal under the Lt. Governors*, Vol.2, Delhi 1976, p.1005 (first published in 1901).
38. *Sulabh Dainik* dt. 26 March, and *Hitavadi* dt.26 March 1897: RNNB, 1897, p.280.
39. Buckland, op.cit.pp. 1005-06. It is interesting to note that certain economic offences like raingambling continue to persist even today. It is reported that "with the onset of monsoon in western Madhya Pradesh, 'pani patra' and 'badalsatta' – two forms of satta gambling are played on the basis of the direction of the wind and the colour of the cloud": *Hindusthan Times*, New Delhi, 5 July 1989.
40. The newspapers in Bengal were sharply divided over the issue of raingambling and so was the Marwari community in Calcutta. It was also held by some that along with rain-gambling, horse-racing too as a form of gambling needed to be banned but no one was demanding it because European officials were among those who indulged in this : RNNB, 1897, p.227.
41. E.H.Sutherland, *White-collar crime*, New York, 1949. For more detailed discussion on the concepts and illustrations of white collar crime and/or economic offences, see

M.B.Clinard and Richard Quinney, *Criminal behaviour systems – a typology*, New York 1967; D.F.Pace and J.C.Style, *Organised crime: concepts and control*, New Jersey, 1975; S.K.Ghosh, *Economic offences*, Calcutta, 1977.

42. BPAAR, 1905, pp.34-35 and *Bengal CID Confidential Report*; dt.4 Sept. 1905 and 13 April 1906.
43. BPAAR, 1907, p.32.
44. BPAAR, 1909, p.10.
45. BPAAR, 1911, p.5.

5 Bengal Criminals

The preceding chapters sought to resolve some of the structural complexities in criminal phenomena with the help of statistical analysis. But a study of crime as a social problem should also bring into focus the human element – the distinguishing characteristics of men and women who chose to resort to the legally proscribed codes of conduct. Were there any specific caste or class configurations in the deviant population? What were the rites, rituals and motivations associated with their criminal activity? What can we infer about the socio-economic background of the incarcerated? Is it pertinent to talk of a criminal typology?

In an attempt to answer some of these questions, this chapter presents a broad survey of Bengal criminals and begins by reviewing excerpts from confessional records and CID dossiers which throw light on the criminal career of some Bengal dacoits of indigenous origin. In the following section we discuss some interesting attributes of certain identifiable social groups with well-established delinquent propensities operating in Bengal during our period of study. Thereafter we attempt to bring out some socio-economic characteristics of Bengal criminals from the data compiled in the Bengal Jail Reports. Finally, we examine the concept of 'criminal typology' in the context of Bengal criminals.

II

It is well known that information about criminals is more difficult to come by than about crimes. This is all the more true for the criminals of

nineteenth century Bengal. Detection, investigation and control of crime in Bengal was a district-level activity, without any province-level coordinating agency. By and large this was the arrangement till the creation of the provincial Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on the recommendations of the Police Commission of 1902-03. As such there was no systematic and uniform maintenance of dossiers of criminals. The years from 1852 to 1863 provided an exception when the office of the Commissioner for the Suppression of Dacoity in Bengal acted as the central crime control agency and left behind some valuable information about the dacoits of Bengal. Neither the annual police administration reports nor the criminal justice administration reports provide any useful insight into the world of the criminals. Hunter's *Statistical Accounts of Bengal* as also the *District Gazetteers* contain only sporadic information on the religious and caste composition of some of the criminal groups. Newspaper reports and periodicals provide even less satisfactory material for building up socio-economic profiles of the men behind the crimes.

In this relatively arid zone of information, autobiographical writings of Bengal policemen have a special place and three such memoirs have come to light recently.¹ All of them served as Darogahs in Bengal during the mid-nineteenth century and they have left behind valuable reminiscences about the contemporaneous system of policing, functioning of the magistracy and the courts etc. These also contain notes on a number of criminal cases which were successfully detected by the authors. But the most authentic and detailed descriptions of the early background of common criminals, their initiation into the criminal fraternity, the organizational pattern and composition of gangs, their rituals, modus operandi etc. are to be found in the confessions of four leaders of dacoit gangs.² We will first take up the case histories of two of them because although they operated mostly during the forties and fifties, their story was typical of the later generation of nineteenth century criminals. These will be followed by brief sketches of two dacoit gangs which earned notoriety during the late nineteenth century.

Nobai Ghosh : Son of Tonoo Ghosh, by caste gwala and a cultivator, he was born around 1816, lost his mother at the age of five and his father at the age of 17 or 18. He belonged to village Mahutpur under Hatra thana in the district of Nadia. After the death of his father, Nobai went to his nephew Hullodhur who taught him lathi play and also took him out occasionally as a 'teeca lathiara' (part-time clubman on hire). Hullodhur

used to commit dacoity with others including Bungshee Dome (one of the lowest castes of Hindus) and Kalla Musalman. In due course Nobai was inducted by Hullodhur into commission of dacoities, both on land and river. After his arrest in 1854, Nobai confessed to having committed at least 24 dacoities – mostly in Nadia district and a few in Burdwan and Murshidabad districts.³

Manick Ghosh : Born around 1816, he was also gwala by caste and could not read or write. His father turned Christian and to avoid conversion, the rest of the family moved away from Palta to Kidderpore. One of his relations in this place indulged in criminal activities and under the latter's apprenticeship, Manick soon joined the gang and embarked on a career of dacoity.⁴

The biographical sketches of two other notorious dacoits – Koober and Bishtoo - ran more or less on similar lines. The confessions of these four dacoits revealed the commission of nearly 109 dacoities, almost half their targets having been boats on the rivers. It appears from their narratives that many of their victims were not wealthy landlords but petty traders, boatmen, ordinary villagers and pilgrims travelling by boat.⁵ It is also seen that many of their victims were of a similar lower social or caste base to which they themselves belonged.⁶ These facts clearly demonstrate that these dacoits could not possibly be credited with any degree of 'social consciousness' so as to elevate their actions to a form of social protest or even of class solidarity. It would be naive, therefore, to apply to these Bengal criminals of the nineteenth century the label of 'social banditry', a form of protest by peasants against oppression by landlords and the upper castes.⁷ On the contrary most of the Bengal dacoits of this period preferred to remain under the protective umbrella of the zamindars as their hired musclemen in addition to their normal profession of crime.⁸

An analysis of the lengthy confessions of the four leaders of dacoit gangs reveals a few interesting features: All the four persons belonged to the cultivating class, none could read or write and none appeared to have taken the path of dacoity as a hereditary profession; all of them, at some time or other, worked as hired lathials of the zamindars even while continuing as dacoits; as hired lathials they could earn nearly Rs.7 to 8 a month whereas the pay of a constable or barkandaz then was only Rs. 5 per month. Their criminal activities were within the knowledge and committed at times with the connivance of the zamindars and their

gomostas. Most of the gangs were of an amphibian type, resorting to crimes on land and river as the opportunity arose.⁹

Some rituals known as *Kalipuja*¹⁰ (worship of the goddess Kali) were almost invariably observed before every commission of dacoity on the land but this was generally not performed on the eve of a boat dacoity. No specific reason was ascribed for such divergence in practice. But from the tenor of their narrations it would appear that a land dacoity needed greater preparation, larger manpower and longer stay at the scene of crimes; besides, the possibility of local villagers mustering to offer resistance was greater. These considerations must have necessitated a psychological preparation to boost morale, foster group solidarity and also to build up tempo just on the eve of the actual attack. That is why another practice of theirs was to rush towards the target immediately after the *Kalipuja*, often with the shouting of some war-cry. Many of the dacoities were committed by gangs which included both Hindus (high or low caste) and Musalmans. But *Kalipuja* and other rituals were observed by all of them.

The gang leader was usually called the 'sardar'. He generally stood sentry during the dacoity and supervised the operation both inside and outside the house. It was the sardar's duty to encourage the rest and give directions as to the part each man was to take. He was also the person who presided over the *Kalipuja* ritual and always got a larger share of the booty than the rest. The novices were made to hold the burning torches and to carry away the looted properties; the veterans specialised in breaking into the house, ransacking boxes, chests etc. When two or three gangs, each having its own sardar, combined for a big operation, the leader of the gang which had invited the other gangs acted as the chief sardar and coordinated the activities of all the participants.

The Karnasuti gang of river dacoits (Pabna district) faced trial in the court of Sessions Judge, Pabna in 1900 where evidence revealed its origin even prior to 1855. One Munshi Akanda was its leader from 1855 to 1880, followed by Gopal Pramanick. The latter was sentenced to transportation for life in 1892, when the mantle of leadership fell on the notorious Mohar Khan. After the trial of 1900, he too suffered the same fate by being transported for life to the Andamans. This case history revealed a well-knit organisational hierarchy. The leader was known as 'captain' and under him were others called 'jemadars'. The rank and file were 'paiks', besides a band of informers known as 'khujiwals'. The 'ostad' was the trainer of new recruits and he ranked next to the captain.¹¹

Kaktengar gang or Makbul Khan gang (Mymensingh): During its trial in Mymensingh in 1906, the ancestry of this gang was traced back to 1880 to one Kadir and his gang of river pirates of Sylhet district. After the 1880 detection, some of the residual members of the gang with their families moved to new areas and formed separate gangs. By about 1883 Makbul had become the leader of a formidable gang of land and river dacoits. Between 1883 and 1905 Makbul was arrested on quite a few occasions but he managed to come out on bail or get acquitted. This added to his notoriety as an invincible gang leader.¹² Finally in 1905 the Bengal CID was pressed into service which started a systematic collection of information from dacoits already in jails and also from other sources on the lines of the old Thuggee and Dakaiti Department of Sleeman. This culminated in the arrest and conviction of Makbul and 34 of his associates.¹³

A study of these two gangs (i.e. Kamasuti and Makbul) and their predecessors shows that quite a few of these dacoits followed a hereditary pattern of criminality. Even then one is left with the impression that group associations and sub-cultural mores rather than heredity were the predisposing factors in the making of these criminals as in the case of Nobai and Manick also. Another aspect which deserves attention is the well-demarcated hierarchical command structure, a feature common to both mid-nineteenth and late nineteenth century dacoit gangs.

III

An interesting demarcation can be perceived in the Bengal underworld of the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. During this period, apart from individual culprits or some small loosely-knit coalitions of malcontents, a very large number and variety of crimes were perpetrated by people belonging to identifiable social groups with marked criminal traits, clearly divided into two subsets according to their extraction. Each group had a distinct identity not only because of well-defined religious and social mores but also because of its characteristic *modus operandi* of crime.

We now consider the more significant among these groups under two heads : (a) indigenous (or local) criminal groups and (b) exogenous (or non-local) criminal groups as shown in Appendix IV and Tables 5.1

and 5.2.¹⁴ Curiously enough, though native groups and outsider groups may have been sharing the same geographical arena of crime and sometimes committing the same types of crime, there is no evidence of any intermingling or collaboration between the two. Also, at least during our period of study, certain types of crime practised by outsiders remained beyond the ken of the local criminal groups. Thus, there is hardly any evidence of the latter's participation in train robbery or counterfeit coinage.

Details regarding place of origin, religious and social practices, occupational background, area of operation, specific criminal behaviour etc. of the various groups are given in Appendix IV.

Later in this section we have referred to the official predilection of associating criminal behaviour with inferior caste ranking. Available information suggests that at least a number of identifiable criminal groups did indeed have a peripheral status from the socio-religious point of view. The 'predatory' Bediyas of Jessore district, for example, were "half-Hindu, half-Muhammedan by religion, recognised by neither".¹⁵ Again, a large number of criminals were contributed by Hinduised tribals, (Bhumij, Lodha) as well as low-caste Hindus (Bagdi, Pode, Kaora). Similarly, the two Muhammedan criminal groups, Sandars and Tuntia Musalmans, had inferior social ranking, rather like the low-caste Hindus; Tuntia girls could not marry into orthodox Muslim families and Sandars were denied entry into orthodox Muslim mosques.

Most indigenous groups professed Hindu religion and worshipped traditional Hindu deities, specially Kali. Many gangs, in fact, initiated their criminal operation with Kali puja. But there were also observances of non-conformist religious practices. Thus, polygamy and divorce were common among the Bhumij who also followed the peculiar custom of interring their deceased in their own houses. The Bagdis allowed widow remarriage and the Dhckarus did not take food from the Muhammedans although they themselves ate beef and pork. Religious ceremonies of the lowcaste groups were usually performed not by Brahman priests but by men of their own caste/sect.

By and large the indigenous criminal groups of Bengal may be said to have a rural orientation in the sense that most of them hailed from and operated in rural areas and alternated criminal activity mostly with agricultural and allied work. The depredations that the

TABLE 5.1
Important indigenous criminal groups operating in Bengal : 1861–1915

| Name(caste/sub-caste). | Typical crime | Area of operation |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| 1. Bediya (Shikari) | Burglary, theft | Jessore, Khulna, Nadia, Hooghly, 24-Parganas, Calcutta. |
| 2. Bhumij | Dacoity | Khatra, Raipur, Chhatna and Indpur police stations of Bankura; Bandwan, Manbazar, Hura, Purulia, Barabazar and Gourangdi police stations of Manbhum (now in Purulia district of West Bengal); Midnapur, Burdwan & Hooghly districts. |
| 3. Bagdi | Dacoity, burglary | Midnapur, Bankura, Burdwan, Birbhum, Hooghly, Murshidabad (19th century); early 20th century: Diamond Harbour sub-division of 24-Parganas, Arambag sub-division of Hooghly & Sadar subdivision of Burdwan districts. |
| 4. Pode | do | Diamond Harbour sub-division of 24-Parganas district (specially Mograhat, Mathurapur and Kulpi police stations). |
| 5. Kaora | do | Diamond Harbour sub-division of 24-Parganas district (specially Mograhat, Mathurapur and Kulpi police stations). |
| 6. Dhekaru | Burglary, theft | Birbhum (specially Rajnagar, Muhammadbazar & Suri police stations). |
| 7. Gain | River dacoity | Meghna and Padma rivers and their tributaries: from Bhairab Bazar in Mymensingh, through Dacca district and upto Chandpur in Tippera district. |
| 8. Lodha | Dacoity | Midnapur district (specially Jhargram, Naraingarh, Kharagpur, Danton, Sabong and Kesiari police stations). |
| 9. Tuntia Musalman " " | do | Midnapur (Ramjibanpur, Garbeta and Kharagpur police stations); Bankura (Seromanipur, Onda, Taldangra, Indpur, Simlapal, Vishnupur and Jaipur police stations); Hooghly (Badanganj, Goghat, Arambag police stations); Burdwan (Raina police station); Calcutta (Beliaghata police station); also noticeable in 24-Parganas, Nadia and Jessore districts. |
| 10. Chhoto Bhagiya Muchi | Dacoity, burglary and cattle poisoning | Jessore, Nadia, Murshidabad, Khulna, Pabna, Rajshahi, 24-Parganas, Burdwan & Hooghly. |
| 11. Sandar | River dacoity | Dacca, Bakarganj, Faridpur, Dinajpur, Malda, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Bogra, Jalpaiguri, Pabna, Chittagong, Tippera, Cooch Behar and some Assam districts. |

Source : F.C.Daly, *Manual of criminal classes operating in Bengal*, 1910.

local offenders typically committed were the traditional crimes of burglary and dacoity (both on land and water) and to some extent cattle poisoning.

The Bediyas and Dhekarus usually confined their criminal activity to burglary and theft. The Byadhs kept to swindling. Most other groups habitually combined dacoity and robbery with lesser crimes such as petty pilfering, snatching and pocket-picking. While Bagdis, Podes, Bhumijes and Lodhas gained notoriety as dacoits and robbers operating on land, Sandars along with some Namasudra and Gain groups specialised in river dacoity. Not all groups indulged in violence. The Bediyas, Dhekarus and Tuntia Musalmans shunned aggressiveness. The Bhumij dacoits, on the other hand, were dreaded for their violence and so were those belonging to the Chhota Bhagiya Muchi clan.

The *sindhkathi*, the lathi, the axe and the sword were almost universal weapons of crime but some groups favoured special methods of attack or entry. While the Dhekaru burglar would use his professional skill as Kamar or blacksmith to effect housebreaking by tampering with locks and bolts, the Tuntia dacoit would use the *dhenki* as a battering ram to force open doors. Though there are records of Bhumij dacoits occasionally carrying firearms, these were rarely used. Use of disguise was also comparatively uncommon, though many gangs had their members' faces and bodies smeared with soot and oil, the latter to facilitate escape even after being caught by the inmates of the house. Several gangs had their own signals and code words. The Sandars' (river dacoits) attack would be preceded by requests for fire from the boatmen of the target boats and the cry of 'Machhi ghono, jal gutao' (i.e. the flies are thick, draw in the net) was the signal for Tuntia dacoits to conclude their operations. Most gangs did not discriminate between different types of property and looted whatever was available including cash, jewellery and food, excepting the Sandars who had a special fascination for cash. The Dhekarus were known for their peculiar habit of entering the kitchen, consuming eatables and then defecating at the site of crime. The Lodhas also quite often feasted on the foodstuffs found in the victims' houses.

Criminal links of these gangs extended to the outside world through receivers of stolen / looted goods who usually did not belong to the criminal caste/group in question. The Sandar criminals' booty, for example, was disposed of through a class of hereditary Muslim silversmiths known as Rasooas, and near Bedia settlements non-Bediya receivers of stolen goods were usually encountered, clearly of higher social status.

Except for a few groups like Byadhs, Dhekarus and Sandars, women of indigenous criminal groups were not generally involved in organised crime. Sandar women were mostly petty pilferers or snatchers, frequenting crowded places like hats or melas. Byadh women took part in swindling tricks and Dhekaru women were dexterous pick-pockets and thieves.

It should be noted that in the case of some of these indigenous groups, the penchant for crime is of comparatively recent origin and there is an apparent link between their criminal bias and economic deprivation. It might be conjectured that at least a few groups drifting into delinquency had also experienced the loss of occupational status as a historical process. A clue to this effect is found in some appellations : the name Sandar is derived from *sana*, the shuttle used in weaving looms which they used to make from bamboo for sale in the days when the weaving industry flourished in Bengal. With the gradual disappearance of this means of livelihood, the Sandars apparently drifted to a gypsy existence in boats and char lands, and eventually found an easy means of livelihood through depredations against defenceless boat traffic in parts of eastern Bengal. Similary Tuntia has reference to *tunt* or mulberry, implying that the Tuntias could earn an honest living from mulberry cultivation in the heyday of the Bengal silk industry.

The 'drift towards criminality by segments of the tribal and aboriginal population inhabiting the Jungal Mahals of Midnapore – Bankura belt (e.g. Bhumij, Lodha etc.) can also be traced to severe disruptions in their traditional modes of subsistence. This process may be said to have started with the trauma that was inflicted in the late eighteenth century when thousands of them engaged by zamindars as paiks and ghatwals (frontier guards) were disbanded. They were not only thrown out of employment but also lost their traditional rights over the paikan and ghatwali chakeran (i.e. service-tenure) lands. This happened largely between 1793 (Reg. XXII) and 1817 (Reg. XX). The Burdwan zamindar alone, for instance, had in 1788 about 2400 armed paiks in different parts of his territory and could call up nearly 19,000 such paiks in times of need (ostensibly for performance of 'Police' duties or maintenance of peace). They along with their counterparts in other zamindari were disbanded under Reg. XXIII/1793 and "their lands allowed them in lieu of pay, resumed...such of those persons who were really disbanded are supposed to have had recourse to thieving for a

livelihood ..."¹⁶ The intensity of the Chuar rebellion (1798-99) may be directly traced to this development.¹⁷

In later years, too, many of these militant inhabitants of the Jungle Mahals and the inhospitable frontier tracts were driven to further desperation by the growing restrictive measures concerning forest land and its products, and exploitation by the new settlers, forest contractors and moneylenders. It is not surprising, therefore, that by the middle of the nineteenth century many of these virile but uprooted and economically deprived people had gradually drifted to the path of criminality as a part of their struggle for survival. The available crime statistics of the 1840s show that the incidence of dacoity was markedly pronounced in the districts where the paiks and ghatwals were most adversely affected, namely, Midnapore, Bankura, Burdwan and Birbhum districts.

Offering a socio-economic explanation for the Lodhas' drift towards criminality, one author has observed that the economic and territorial displacement suffered by them had a great impact on their lifestyle and ultimately upset their livelihood pattern; individual practices then gradually crystallized into group habits leading to criminality.¹⁸ A slightly modified view but perhaps of more general applicability would be that their crime, if any, was not the crime of an economically displaced tribe but that of an economically and socially depressed people indistinguishable from that of similar classes among non-tribals also.

As evident from Table 5.2, most of the exotic criminal groups hailed from certain districts of UP and Bihar. They resembled their indigenous counterparts with regard to religious affiliation. They were predominantly Hindu, generally belonging to the lower strata of the caste hierarchy and often observing customs alien to conventional Hindu religion. Jadua (Jadu=magic) Brahmans, e.g., indulged in fish, meat and liquor and Bhamptas who also called themselves Hindu, freely consorted with Muhammedans. The worship of Kali, again, was a recurrent feature.

As with the local groups, amongst the exotic gangs, criminal involvement of women was not universal. The Karwal Nut, Kepmari and Pasi women, however, were skilful accomplices in crime. A peculiar feature of Karwal Nut gangs was that when on the march, they were led by women. At least one group — the Barwars—systematically inducted young boys aged 7-14 for initiating them into the intricacies of railway crime; similarly the Kepmaris regularly kidnapped young girls for assimilation into Kepmari gangs.

The occupational background of the exotic criminals was more varied. As a large number worked as coolies or mill hands and also sought opportunities for crime in urban areas, there was an urban bias to the activities of this conglomeration. The caste names of some of these people are also indicative of their original occupation. The Chhapparbands are believed to have been descendants of the camp-followers of the Mughal armies, building huts for the army from the marsh grass. The Pasis were at one time engaged in tapping of palm trees and the caste name was derived from the word *pasa*, the sling or noose used in climbing the trees.

In contrast to the indigenous criminal groups, the outsiders were adept at a much wider spectrum of crime, ranging from dacoity and theft to comparatively new forms of crime such as duping railway passengers, robbery in running trains and manufacture of counterfeit coins.

TABLE 5.2
Important exogenous criminal groups operating in Bengal
1861 - 1915

| Name (caste/sub-caste). | Typical crime | Areas of operation | Place of origin |
|-------------------------|---|---|--------------------|
| 1. Baid Musalman | Swindling | 24-Parganas, Pabna, Bogra, Bankura, Murshidabad, Nadia (besides other parts of India) | Rajputana |
| 2. Liarwar | Theft in running trains & railway stations. | Goalundo, Narainganj, Chandpur, Jagannathganj, Damukdia, Sara ghat, Sirajganj (all in eastern Bengal), Lalgolaghat (Murshidabad), Ranaghat (Nadia) and Kharagpur (Midnapore). | U.P. |
| 3. Marwari Bauria | Counterfeit coinage. | Mymensingh, Barisal, Khulna, Jessore, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Faridpur, Calcutta. | Rajputana |
| 4. Bhampta | Theft in running trains & railway stations | Ranaghat, Kushtia, Saidpur, Dacca, Howrah, Raniganj, Goalundo, Kharagpur, Dacca-Mymensingh Rly. route. | Bombay Presidency. |
| 5. Bhur | Burglary, theft | 24-Parganas, Calcutta, Howrah, Hooghly, Midnapur, Dacca, Burdwan, Dinajpur, Malda, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Nadia, Bogra, Mymensingh. | U.P. |

Continue

| Name (caste/sub-caste). | Typical crime | Areas of operation | Place of origin |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|---|
| 6. Chhattisgarh Chamar | Burglary, cattle lifting | Midnapur, Howrah, Nadia, Jessore, Khulna. | Central Provinces |
| 7. Chhapparband | Counterfeit coinage | All over Bengal besides other Provinces. | Bombay Presidency (Bijapur dist.) |
| 3. Magahiya Dom | Burglary, highway robbery | All districts of Bengal except Bakarganj, Chittagong, Tippera, Khulna. | U.P and Bihar |
| 9. Palwar Dusadh | Burglary | Malda, Mymensingh, Dinajpur, Murshidabad and the coal-mining areas of Burdwan district; Cooch Behar and Assam (partly). | U.P. (Ballia district) |
| 10. Jadua Brahmin | Swindling | Most districts of Bengal (no area in particular). | Bihar (Patna & Muzaffarpur dists.). |
| 11. Karwari Hut | Burglary, theft. | Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Pabna, Mymensingh, Nadia, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Bogra, Darjeeling, Murshidabad, Midnapur, Bankura. | Nomadic (U.P./Bihar) |
| 12. Kepmari or Inakoravar | Railway theft. | South-Eastern (Bengal-Nagpur) Rly. routes including Puri and Cuttack (Orissa), Calcutta, Midnapur, Kharagpur etc. | Madras, Presidency (Trichinopoly dist.) |
| 13. Mallahs | River crime. | River routes along the Ganga, Bhagirathi and Brahmaputra rivers & their tributaries: Rangpur (Jatrapur, Phulchari), Faridpur (Goalundo, Pangsa), Mymensingh (Bhairab Bazar, Narainganj), Pabna (Serajganj, Saraghat), Nadia (Khoksha, Kushtia, Poradah, Mirpur & Damukdia), Murshidabad (Azimganj), Chittagong, Sunderbans and Goalpara district of Assam. | U.P. and Bihar |
| 14. Pasi | Dacoity, robbery | Jessore, Faridpur, Rangpur, Nadia, Midnapur, Bankura, Dacca, Mymensingh, Calcutta and its neighbouring districts. | U.P. and Bihar. |
| 15. Chain Mallah | Pocket picking, snatching | Rajshahi, Pabna, Bogra, Rangpur, Dacca. | U.P. |

Source : F.C.Daly, *Manual of criminal classes operating in Bengal*, 1910.

Dacoities, burglaries and thefts were committed by Bhurs, Karwal Nuts, Magahiya Doms, Pasis and Palwar Dusadhs while river crimes were the domain of Mallahs. Barwars, Bhamptas and Kepmaris specialised in robbing passengers waiting at railway stations or travelling in trains. Jadua Brahmins swindled their victims by pretending to possess magical powers such as conversion of cheap metal into gold. Chhapparbands duplicated fake coins from clay moulds and exchanged them for genuine rupees by sleight-of-hand. It is interesting to observe that these specialised forms of crime generally remained the monopoly of outsiders.

As a whole the exotic criminals displayed more sophisticated *modus operandi*. Railway crimes, in particular, required a certain degree of professionalism which the Barwars and the Kepmaris exhibited to a remarkable extent. The Barwars made a thorough study of railway time tables and communicated in their own code language. Both Bhamptas and Barwars were particularly adept at masquerading as pilgrims, tradesmen, sepoys, railway contractors, Europeans or even as women. Many of these criminals were multi-lingual and some could even boast of a smattering of English. Presumably literacy was not a rare phenomenon among the exotic groups as probably was the case with the rustic criminals of indigenous origin. This presumption is strengthened by the fact that the former made clever use of the modern means of communication for disposal of booty. The Kepmaris were described as 'educated thieves' and together with Barwars and Bhamptas contrived to despatch their loot to distant destinations by means of money orders or postal parcels.

Some of these groups exhibited a marked territoriality. This is perhaps best illustrated in the case of the Mallahs. The Bengal rivers seemed to have been divided up into well-recognised beats amongst these upcountry boatmen. Thus, the Mirzapuris mostly used to go to Assam where they controlled the log traffic; en route they operated at places like Sirajgang, Munshiganj, Bhairab Bazar etc. The Pasis of Oudh and Eastern U.P. mainly infested the creeks and rivers around Chandpur, Narayanganj and Barisal, the more enterprising among them going up to Guwahati and Tejpur in Assam. The Gorakhpur, Benaras and Allahabad bands exploited the waterways around Sirajganj, Goalando and Dacca while the Jaunpur, Ghazipur and Faizabad men concentrated on the lower reaches of the Bhagirathi and other rivers surrounding Nadia, Jessore and Calcutta.

The question inevitably arises : why did such substantial numbers of criminal adventurers flock into Bengal from distant places? This may perhaps be partially answered, again, by recalling the history of the upcountry boatman migrating to Bengal.

The infiltration of criminal elements into Bengal from neighbouring provinces has to be viewed as part of a larger pattern of immigration. This became more pronounced from the late fifties of the nineteenth century in the wake of railway construction and establishment of mining and manufacturing industries. The Barwars from Gonda (U.P.), Chhatisgarh Chamars from Bilaspur (U.P.), Pasis from Oudh (U.P.) and Palwar Dusadhs from Ballia (U.P.), all potential criminal groups, came to Bengal primarily as labourers in mills, coal fields or railway work sites. The cooly lines in the industrial centres located in Calcutta, Howrah, Hooghly, Burdwan and Dacca served as convenient shelters for the upcountry criminals having a marked impact on the crime and public order problems of Bengal.

Secondly, the comparative wealth of the inhabitants of Eastern Bengal, their manner of living in detached and isolated mudhuts instead of closely-knit village clusters, the exaggerated ideas about the prowess of upcountry criminals, lack of adequate policing of the waterways— all these combined to create a situation of less danger and greater attraction for the upcountry criminals to operate in certain areas of Bengal.

Enquiries by the Bramley team revealed that in many cases the Mallahs' incentive to crime lay in the extortions of their creditors in their respective native places. Being by nature a thriftless and careless people, the Mallahs, as a rule, were hopelessly involved in debt and entirely in the hands of their Mahajans and zamindars who advanced them money at exorbitant rates to build their boats etc., and then kept up a constant pressure in respect of realisation of the interest, and it was this fact which undoubtedly was one of the main incentives for the commission of crime by these people. They always counted on successful trips, and therefore in order to insure themselves against loss they either took to thieving themselves or took down Pasis, Bhurs, Kolcs, Khatiks and other expert burglars and criminals for the express purpose of making them a means of raising funds when business was slack.¹⁹

Another aggravating factor was the gradual substitution of river transport by road and rail transport in Bengal during the second half of the nineteenth century. This was true of most of the major waterways of Bengal. The East Indian Railways competed with the Bhagirathi river

routes and the Eastern Bengal State Railway gradually took over the goods traffic on Mathabhangha and Jalangi rivers; the boat traffic on the Midnapur and Hijli canals steadily declined after the opening of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway²⁰ and so did the boat traffic on the Calcutta canals after the opening of the Bengal Central Railway.²¹ Even around 1860, many boatmen did not find their trade remunerative enough. Faced with a threatened livelihood, many abandoned their traditional calling in search of other jobs that seemed to offer better prospects²² and some took to crime as part-time occupation to supplement their dwindling income. This also may have prompted them to invite many of the known criminal gangs and tribes of their native places for operations in Bengal.

Economic hardship, however, was not the only impelling factor behind criminality. For some groups it may have played a crucial role at some point but with the passage of time criminal activity may have become an established way of life for them. The Kepmari group serves as an illustration of the above hypothesis. The Kepmaris of Trichinopoly were obviously not stricken by poverty. Many of them were educated and relatively well-off (often dressed in costly silk attire) – yet they were considered "real criminals" and none of them worked for an honest living. Upcountry groups such as Dharhis (who, like the Bagdis of Bengal were known for their militancy and were often employed as lathials) and the Magahiya Doms (for whom 'commission of crime was an obligation of manhood'), looked upon regular work with extreme distaste and obviously found an outlet for their native aggressiveness in assault and plunder.

IV

At this point an explanation is perhaps needed as to why we have made use of jail data on convicts in this analysis of criminals. The choice has been dictated, firstly, by compulsion. Neither the police administration reports nor the criminal justice administration reports contain any break-up on sex, age, religion, occupational background or marital status of either the persons arrested or those sent up for trial in courts. Secondly, even if such details were given, the margin of error would not be insignificant. Thus a single person being arrested on, say, three different cases on three different occasions, or this very person being on trial in court in three different cases will naturally inflate the number of arrests

or of persons on trial. There is no such possibility of distortion when we take up the figures of convicts in jails. Reconviction figures being not very considerable, the margin of error will be relatively small.²³

The five tables appearing below present information on convicts lodged in Bengal jails disaggregated by sex, age, religion, marital status and occupational background at four (in one case three) points of time between 1875 and 1900. Table 5.3 providing a sexwise break-up shows that throughout this 26-year period (1875- 1900), females have not only formed a very minor component of criminals, their proportion in relation to male criminals has maintained a steady downward trend (4.7% in 1875, 3.9% in 1881, 3.3% in 1891 and 2.7% in 1900). It further indicates that the abnormally high number of convicts in 1875 corresponds with one of our earlier findings which showed it to be a peak year with respect to TC; in that connection we had also seen that a very large number of minor and petty offences were registered in 1875, types of cases in which arrest and conviction rates are apt to be high.

Table 5.4 indicates that juvenile offenders have all through the period been an insignificant part of the total number of convicted criminals, being less than 1.5%. It is obvious that the large majority of convicted criminals (both male and female) have come from the 16-40 age group constituting nearly 75% of the total convicts. Moreover, there is a steadily declining trend in the number of female offenders in the higher age groups (40-60 and above 60 years).

Table 5.5 reveals the religious composition of the convict population and shows that between 1881 and 1900, Christian and Muslim convicts formed a larger proportion of the total number of Bengal criminals than their respective population-religion ratio would have warranted (vide serials 5, 10 and 15 of this table). The official records do not offer any plausible explanation for this. However, as compared to other communities, the convict-population ratio as well as the female convict-female population ratio was marginally higher among the Christians (vide serials 4, 9, 14 and 6, 11, 16 of the table).

Though not reflected in the above table, another significant point may be mentioned in this connection. As compared to the native Christians, the European and Eurasian Christians formed the bulk of the Christian convicts almost throughout this period. The relevant figures for the years 1881 and 1900 will illustrate this:

1881 : out of a total of 84 Christian convicts, 38 were Europeans, 25 Eurasians and only 21 native Christians, i.e. 75% were non-native Christians.²⁴

1900 : of the 324 Christian convicts, 210 were Europeans, 64 Eurasians and 50 natives, i.e. non-natives accounted for nearly 85% of the Christian convicts.²⁵

Table 5.6 classifies the female convicts in Bengal jails according to marital status. The high incidence of widows among the female convicts is noteworthy. However, there is no firm data to indicate the socio-economic background of these widows.

TABLE 5.3
Male and female convicts in Bengal jails as % of Bengal population

| | 1875 | 1881 | 1891 | 1900 |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. Total no. of convicts | 32605 | 9839 | 11565 | 11289 |
| 2. Total population | 34123972 | 36322302 | 39095855 | 42147895 |
| 3. Population aged 15 - 60 | - | 19537000 | - | 23220000 |
| 4. 1 as % of 2 | 0.10 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.03 |
| 5. 1 as % of 3 | - | 0.05 | - | 0.05 |
| 6. No. of male convicts | 31083 | 9456 | 11189 | 10985 |
| 7. Male population | 17114419 | 18206758 | 19800792 | 21491387 |
| 8. ... aged 15-60 | - | 9697000 | - | 11589000 |
| 9. 6 as % of 7 | 0.18 | 0.05 | 0.06 | 0.05 |
| 10. 6 as % of 8 | - | 0.10 | - | 0.09 |
| 11. No. of female convicts | 1522 | 383 | 376 | 304 |
| 12. Female population | 17009553 | 18115544 | 19295063 | 20658508 |
| 13. ... aged 15-60 | - | 9840000 | - | 11640000 |
| 14. 11 as % of 12 | 0.01 | 0.002 | 0.002 | 0.001 |
| 15. 11 as % of 13 | - | 0.004 | - | 0.003 |
| 16. Female convicts as % of male convicts | 4.7 | 3.9 | 3.3 | 2.7 |

Note : Population figures for 1875 and 1900 are those enumerated in 1872, 1901 respectively.

Sources : *Bengal Jail Administration Report*, relevant years; COB 1872; COB 1881 Vol. II; COI 1901, Vol. VI A, relevant age distribution tables.

Table 5.7 throws light on the occupational background of male convicts. Apart from some data on convicted prostitutes, no other relevant information on livelihood patterns of female convicts could be

retrieved. Predictably, a high percentage (average of 55.4 for the three decadal periods) of the convicted male criminals was engaged in 'agriculture and (hunting of) wild animals'; the second part of the description presumably included the Bediyas and Byadhs. The public servants (sl.1) formed a not too trivial proportion of the convicts.

TABLE 5.4
Convicts in Bengal jails distributed by age-groups

| | | | 1875 | 1881 | 1891 | 1900 |
|----|------------------------------|--------|-------|------|------|-------|
| 1. | Total convicts (all ages) | | 31152 | 9839 | 9569 | 11289 |
| 2. | Under 16 years | Male | 330 | 49 | 85 | 147 |
| | | Female | 22 | 3 | 9 | 5 |
| | | Total | 352 | 52 | 94 | 152 |
| | Total as % of total convicts | | 1.1 | 0.5 | 1.0 | 1.3 |
| 3. | 16 - 40 yrs | Male | 22367 | 6953 | 6665 | 8142 |
| | | Female | 1014 | 280 | 258 | 224 |
| | | Total | 23381 | 7233 | 6923 | 8366 |
| | Total as % of total convicts | | 75.0 | 73.5 | 72.3 | 74.1 |
| 4. | 40 - 60 years | Male | 5422 | 2007 | 2109 | 2336 |
| | | Female | 278 | 81 | 100 | 58 |
| | | Total | 5700 | 2088 | 2209 | 2394 |
| | Total as % of total convicts | | 18.3 | 21.2 | 23.0 | 21.2 |
| 5. | above 60 years | Male | 1626 | 447 | 328 | 360 |
| | | Female | 93 | 19 | 15 | 17 |
| | | Total | 1719 | 466 | 343 | 377 |
| | Total as % of total convicts | | 5.5 | 4.7 | 3.7 | 3.3 |

Note : Totals of convicts for 1875 and 1891 in this table are based on actual age-group figures and do not tally with the annual table for these two years which stood at 32605 and 11565 respectively.

Source : *Bengal Jail Administration Reports, Appendix Statement II (Judicial),* relevant years.

TABLE 5.5
Convicts in Bengal jails distributed by religion

| | | 1875 | 1881 | 1891 | 1900 |
|----|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| 1. | Total No. of convicts | 32605 | 9839 | 11565 | 11289 |
| 2. | No. of Christian convicts | 594 | 84 | 208 | 324 |
| 3. | Christian population | 64050 | 72102 | 81843 | 106143 |
| 4. | 2 as % of 3 | 0.93 | 0.12 | 0.25 | 0.3 |

Continued

| | 1875 | 1881 | 1891 | 1900 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 5. 2 as % of 1 | 1.82 (0.20) | 0.85 (0.20) | 1.80 (0.21) | 2.87 (0.26) |
| 6. % of females among 2 | — | 2.4 | 2.0 | 3.7 |
| 7. No. of Muslim convicts | 16882 | 5071 | 6434 | 6201 |
| 8. Muslim population | 17609135 | 17863411 | 19582349 | 21316427 |
| 9. 7 as % of 8 | 0.10 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.03 |
| 10. „ „ „ 1 | 51.8 (47.94) | 51.5 (50.17) | 55.6 (51.26) | 54.9 (51.66) |
| 11. % of females among 7 | - | 2.9 | 2.5 | 1.8 |
| 12. No. of Hindu convicts | 15323 | 4375 | 4837 | 4465 |
| 13. Hindu population | 18100438 | 17254120 | 18068655 | 19195240 |
| 14. 12 as % of 13 | 0.08 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.02 |
| 15. „ „ „ 1 | 47.0 (49.27) | 44.5 (48.46) | 41.8 (47.21) | 37.7 (46.52) |
| 16. % of females among 12 | - | 5.0 | 4.4 | 3.6 |

- Note :** (i) Figures in parentheses denote population of a given religion as % of total Bengal population.
(ii) Population figures for 1875 and 1900 are those enumerated in 1872 and 1901 respectively.

Sources : *Bengal Jail Administration Reports* (relevant years);
COB 1872, General Statement A (pp.6-9);
COB 1881, Vol.H. Table III (pp.18-19);
COI 1891, Vol.IV, Table IV (pp.36.38)
COI 1901, Vol.VIA (part II), Table VI (pp.26-28).

TABLE 5.6
Marital status of female convicts in Bengal jails

| | 1875 | 1881 | 1891 | 1900 |
|-----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Married | 451 (29.6) | 146 (38.1) | 135 (35.9) | 113 (37.2) |
| Unmarried | 86 (5.7) | 4 (1.0) | 19 (5.1) | 8 (2.6) |
| Widow | 584 (38.4) | 172 (44.9) | 181 (48.1) | 125 (41.1) |

Note : Female convicts not classified according to marital status are usually shown as prostitutes in the relevant Jail Reports. Figures in parentheses denote a given category as % of the total number of female convicts.

Source : *Bengal Jail Administration Reports* (relevant years).

TABLE 5.7
Occupations of convicts admitted in jails of Bengal proper

| | 1881 | 1891 | 1900 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Government, Municipal or other local authorities | 357 (3.6) | 351 (3.0) | 194 (1.7) |
| 2. Professional persons | 408 (4.2) | 257 (12.2) | 1057 (9.4) |
| 3. Persons in service or performing personal offices | 435 (8.6) | 1305 (11.3) | 1724 (11.3) |
| 4. Engaged in agriculture and hunting of wild animals | 6115 (62.2) | 6216 (53.8) | 5787 (51.3) |
| 5. Commerce and Trade | 592 (6.0) | 386 (3.3) | 547 (4.9) |
| 6. Mechanical arts, Manufactures etc. | 372 (3.8) | 167 (1.4) | 215 (1.9) |
| 7. Prostitutes | 64 (16.7) | 49 (13.0) | 63 (20.7) |
| 8. Miscellaneous persons (male) not classified otherwise | 691 (7.0) | 2498 (21.6) | 1729 (15.3) |

Note : Figures in parentheses denote a given category of convicts as % of the total number of convicts except for serial number 7 where they relate to the total number of female convicts.

Source : *Bengal Jail Administration Reports* (relevant years).

V

For nearly a century and a half the British colonial administrators were obsessed with a criminal typology in India. To most of them the Indian criminals were hereditary in origin and composition. Thus, according to a letter dated 15 August 1772 from the Committee of Circuit to the President and Council of the East India Company in Calcutta, "The dacoits of Bengal are not, like the robbers in England, individuals driven to such desperate courses by sudden want; they are robbers by profession, and even by birth."²⁶ While introducing the Criminal Tribes Bill of 1871, the Law Member of the Governor General's Council stated : "It means a tribe whose ancestors were criminals from time immemorial, who are themselves destined by the usage of caste to commit crimes, and whose descendants will be offenders against Law, until the whole tribe is exterminated or accounted for in the manner of the Thugs..."²⁷ It might be recalled,

however, that though gang robbery or dacoity was a common criminal profession in Bengal, its hereditary origin was not very common as borne out by the case histories discussed earlier in this chapter.

Another common refrain in official accounts was that the Bengal criminals sprang from the low caste Hindus and low class Musalmans. Thus crimes in Jessore district were believed to be committed usually by the lower caste Hindus like Bediyas, Muchis and others of this category.²⁸ The perpetrators of dacoities in Murshidabad district were, according to official accounts, the 'lower classes of Muhammadans and the inferior castes of Hindus' (such as Goalias, Bagdis, Doms, Haris, Chamars etc.). Violent crimes and offences against women in Bakarganj district were generally attributed to Mussalmans. In Faridpur district gang robberies were believed to be committed by the Chandals (Namasudras) or the lower order of Kayasthas; murders were generally committed by Musalmans of the lower classes, and the gangs of lathials belonged in most part to the Musalmans, Chandals and Bhumalis. So far as Mymensingh district was concerned, the official accounts indicated that offences against property were usually committed by Hindus, whereas those against women (e.g. adultery, abduction, rape) were the handiwork of Musalmans of lower class.²⁹

These, however, reflected only a part of the reality and it would be a mistake to build up a criminal typology on the basis of such perceptions. This would be quite evident from Table 5.8. It will be apparent from this table that, proportionately, the higher castes (e.g. Brahmins, Rajpoots, and Kayasthas) contributed as much to the total body of convicts as any of the lower castes and classes. This trend was evident even at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century as borne out by the 1911 census data.

In this context it is necessary to take note of another special feature of the Bengal criminal scene. Though Bengal continued to be plagued by depredations of criminal tribes and gangs (e.g. Pasis, Bhamptas, Chhapparbandhs, Karwal Nuts, Magahiya Doms etc.), all of them were exotic in origin. There was no local criminal tribe as such in Bengal unlike most other provinces in British India. The Bediyas of Jessore, the Bhumijis of Midnapore-Bankura, the Lodhas of Midnapore and the Sandars of eastern Bengal districts undoubtedly contributed a fair sprinkling of criminals within their fold but they could not be termed as "criminal tribes". It is noteworthy that in spite of the Criminal Tribes Act being in the statute book since 1871, none of the local 'criminal' groups

TABLE 5.8
Convicts by principal religious groups, castes/sects in
Bengal (LPB) jails : 1874

| | Total po- pulation(a) | No. of Con- victs (b) | (b) as % of (a) | Jails where majority of them were lodged |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--|
| Bhumij | 200133 | 134 | 0.06 | Manbhum 107, Singhbhum 13, Presidency 6 |
| Santhal | 922816 | 249 | 0.2 | Midnapore 77, Naya Dumka 69, Bankura 27, Manbhum 22 |
| Munda | 190095 | 106 | 0.5 | Lohardaga 85, Alipore 10, Hazaribagh 6 |
| Bagdi | 693722 | 546 | 0.08 | Murshidabad 68, Birbhum 107, Burdwan 68 |
| Bauri | 405945 | 331 | 0.08 | Bankura 70, Burdwan 68, Birbhum 52, Manbhum 44 |
| Chandal | 1493426 | 643 | 0.04 | Jessore 211, Dacca 104, Bakarganj 73 |
| Dom | 320915 | 719 | 0.22 | Patna Div. 322, Burdwan Div. 174, Bhagalpur Div. 117 |
| Hari | 258971 | 348 | 0.13 | Purnea 70, Birbhum 54, Murshidabad 42 |
| Muchi, Chamar | 1177234 | 846 | 0.08 | Birbhum 79, Presidency 36, Nadia 31, Patna Div. 331 |
| Rajbansi | 778621 | 384 | 0.05 | Rangpur 163, Jalpaiguri 161, Alipur 19 |
| Brahmin | 2375861 | 1247 | 0.05 | Tirhoot 121, Presidency 101, Alipur 85, Jessore 71 |
| Chhetri/ Rajput | 1231648 | 957 | 0.07 | Patna Div. 517, Bhagalpur Div. 88, Presidency 37, Hazaribagh 32 |
| Kayastha | 1517052 | 840 | 0.05 | Presidency 89, Alipore 88, Tirhoot 75, Jessore 57 |
| Goala | 3114518 | 1448 | 0.04 | Mostly in Patna Div., Monghyr 60, Presidency 59 |
| Chasa | 483493 | 324 | 0.07 | Midnapur 144, Puri 47, Cuttack 43 |
| Sudra | 50060 | 101 | 0.20 | Dacca 59, Tippera 27, Chittagong 15 |
| Napit | 732264 | 174 | 0.02 | Presidency 24, Midnapur 14 |
| Dhopa | 478268 | 112 | 0.02 | Presidency 20, Alipore 14, Murshidabad 8 |
| Pod | 292974 | 125 | 0.04 | Alipur 112, Presidency 9 |
| Muslim: | | | | |
| Sheikh/ Sunnis | 1071045 | 11781 | 1.09 | |
| Pathan | 143266 | 532 | 0.37 | |
| Feraji & others | 18140658 | 446 | 0.002 | |

Source : *Bengal Jail Administration Report, 1874*

or tribes was brought within its purview. It was for the first time during 1914-1916 that some specified criminal gangs³⁰ in Bengal were notified under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1911 and were subjected to the following

restrictions : "to notify his place of residence and any change or intended change of residence, and any absence or intended absence from his residence".³¹ Unlike the situation in other provinces, the entire community or tribe was not notified as a 'criminal tribe' nor was it required to stay in a specified 'settlement' or encampment. Secondly, the restrictions applied only to those active members (each mentioned by name) of the specified criminal gang who were earlier convicted of or were strongly suspected to have committed serious offences against property (e.g., dacoity, robbery, burglary). In view of the above it may be difficult to wholly subscribe to the general impression that the application of the Criminal Tribes Act 'amounted to a verdict of collective guilt' for the entire tribe or community.³² At least in Bengal the actual application of the Act did not convey any such general labelling of the entire community.

Official accounts do not indicate anything to suggest that the Bengal dacoits of the mid and late-nineteenth century had any Robin Hoods among them or that they resembled Hobsbawm's 'social bandits'. Some vernacular publications of a later period, however, mention such personalities among the Bengal dacoits. Hailing from village Gadra-Bhalchhala under Chopra P.S of Nadia District, Biswanath Bagdi was one of them. His personal courage and concern for women, children and the poor earned for him a high-caste appellation of Bishu Babu. He was a terror to the oppressive native zamindars and British indigo planters.³³ We hear of another Biswanath, Dom by caste and belonging to Rishra in Hooghly district. This Bishe Dakat, according to one account, was also a terror to the affluent but a saviour to the needy and the distressed. It is reported that he once came to learn of a doctor's refusal to treat the cholera stricken child of a poor woman without payment of adequate fee and forced the doctor not only to treat the child but other villagers also. Another legendary figure is Raghu dakat who operated in the districts of Nadia, Hooghly and 24-Parganas and was reportedly assisted by the Shikaris (Bediyas), having in his gang both Hindus and Muslims. One of the stories which circulated in his praise related to an old Brahmin's daughter. On her wedding day, the bridegroom's party was reluctant to come unless more dowry was sent to them that very day. Raghu's intervention saved the day and the marriage was duly solemnised.³⁴

Of all the non-official accounts published so far, perhaps Biswanath Bagdi – Bishu Babu of Nadia alone approximates to Hobsbawm's concept of 'social bandit'. To assess the nature and the extent of social

banditry in nineteenth century Bengal, it would be necessary, among other things, to search and sift the folklore and oral history of Bengal villages. This should be an appropriate area for further research.

NOTES

1. Miajahn. *The confessions of Miajahn, darogah of Police*, Calcutta, 1896; Girish Chandra Bose. *Sekaler darogar kahini* (the tales of a darogah of the yester-years), Dacca, 1888 (reprinted in Calcutta 1983); Bankanulla *Bankanullar daftar*, Calcutta, 1896 (reprinted in Calcutta, 1982). Some scholars are doubtful about the authenticity of Miajahn.
2. GOB. *Selections from the confessions of dacoit approvers* (hereafter *Confessions*), Calcutta, 1857.
3. *ibid.*, p.1.
4. *ibid.*, p.29.
5. *ibid.*, pp.1, 6, 9, 18, 101, 102, etc.
6. *ibid.*, pp.5, 13, 33, 71, 72, 78, etc.
7. For an exposition of the concept of social banditry, see E.J.Hobsbawm, *Primitive rebels*, Manchester, 1959, and *Bandits*, London, 1969. For a critique of Hobsbawm, see Anton Blok, "The peasant and the brigand : social banditry reconsidered", *Contemporary studies in society and history*, vol.14, 1972.
8. *Sekaler darogar kahini*, p.10; Prasannamoyee Devi, *Purbakatha*, Calcutta, 1324 BS, pp.11ff.
9. *Confessions*, pp.1, 29, 115, 117, etc.
10. A typical *kalipuja* before a land dacoity is described thus: at some distance from the house to be raided, the sardar (gang leader) selects a clean piece of land, where all the members are made to sit down. Those that are to stand sentry sit on one side and the rest opposite to them in one line. All the weapons, bamboos, massals (torches yet to be lighted) etc. are placed in the middle; then the sardar standing in the middle between the two lines asks "Are you all of one mind?" Everyone answers 'yes'. This is done three times. Then the sardar holds a piece of cloth in his hand and says "well, if the dacoity is to be committed, let this cloth be torn for the torches"; all say "Tear it". He tears it and puts it on the massals. After this he says "Shall I put oil on the torch?" All reply, "Let oil be put". After this is done, the sardar goes round and gives to each man a drop of liquor, and dipping his little finger in it, makes a mark on each man's forehead. The *bhaur* (earthen pot) in which the liquor (or oil) was kept is held up and he again says "Are you all agreed?" On getting a reply in the affirmative the sardar throws the *bhaur* and breaks it by saying "so and so's (i.e.the victim's) head is broken". As soon as the *kalipuja* is performed thus, they run as fast as they can, looking neither left nor right, and at once attack the house.: *Confessions*, pp.85, 92 etc.
11. *Bengal CID Records on gang cases*.
12. Since the early nineties of the 19th century, the Bengal administration was becoming increasingly concerned about the leniency of courts in awarding punishments to

convicted criminals including those who were convicted on earlier occasions. It was felt that such 'morbid dread of inflicting heavy sentences' on the part of magistrates was providing indirect inducement for recurrent criminal depredations (BPAARS 1890, 1896, 1897, 1898, etc.). Though there are no accurate data to show the time taken by police to complete investigation or to send up an arrested person to stand trial, trials in courts—magistrates' courts in less heinous cognisable cases and sessions courts in graver cases—appear to have been completed quite expeditiously. Thus the average time taken for completion of a trial in a magistrate's court was 10 days and it took about 50 days for a session trial (*Criminal Justice Administration Report*, LPH, 1891, pp.13 and 19). The latter courts took an average of 55 days in 1900 (*ibid.*, p.5).

13. *Bengal CID Records on gang cases*, especially Pamphlet No.47 of Bengal CID on *Mymensingh gang case* (1906) and Bengal CID *List of Active Dacoit Gangs in Bengal*, 1919, SI.NO.121.
14. Descriptive account of criminal groups in this section is based on *Criminal Intelligence Gazettees* of Bengal CID; *Manual of Criminal classes operating in Bengal* by F.C.Daly of Bengal CID, 1916; H.H.Risley, *Castes and tribes of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1891; E.T.Dalton, *A descriptive ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1872; *Bramley Report on upcountry river criminals operating in Bengal (1903-04)*; *Quarry's Report on up-country river criminals*, Bengal CID, 1913.
15. W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.II, p.49.
16. *Fifth Report*, pp.129f.
17. The earlier uprisings of this nature, though on a relatively subdued scale, were staged during 1766-83 by the Khoyras (Kheriyas?), Manjhis and the Chuars. For details, see—J.C.Price. *Chuar rebellion*; L.S.S.O' Malley, *History of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa under British rule*, Calcutta 1925; L.S.S.O' Malley, *Midnapore District Gazetteer*, Calcutta 1911; Trailokyanath Pal, *Medinipurer itihās*, Vol.I, 1888; Suproakash Roy, *Bharater krishak bidroh o ganatantrik sangram*, pp.139-56.
18. P.K Bhowmick, "Some problems of the Lodhas", *Bulletin of the Cultural Research Institute*, Cal., Vol.II, No.2, 1964.
19. *Bramley Report*, Appendix para 13.
20. *Report on the riverborne traffic of the Lower Provinces of Bengal and on the Inland and sea-borne trade of Calcutta for the year 1899-1900*, Chapter II, para 2 and Chapter III, para.2.
21. *Report on the river-borne traffic of the Lower Provinces of Bengal and on the Inland Trade of Calcutta for the year 1884-85*, Chapter VIII, pp.27f.
22. *Report of the Indigo Commission*, 1860, p.153 (Testimony of Reverend James Long).
23. During the last quarter of the 19th century the reconviction rate (i.e. of the total convicts in jail in a given year, the number convicted in some case/cases on earlier occasions) remained around 10% : *Bengal Jail Administration Reports* (BJARs). 1874, p.11 and 1881, p.11.
24. BJAR, 1881, Appendix Statement II (Judicial).
25. BJAR, 1900, Appendix Statement II (Judicial).
26. Cited in W.R.Gourlay, *op.cit.*, Ch.IV, para 17. Similar views were expressed by a number of British administrators, e.g. see *Fifth Report*, 1813, Vol.I, pp.127ff;

- BPAAR, 1872, p.83, etc. The existence of hereditary 'criminal' tribes in certain other parts of India might have been partly responsible for this type of generalisation in the case of Bengal also.
27. Cited in the *Report of the U.P. Criminal Tribes Enquiry Committee*, 1948, para. 9.
 28. W.W. Hunter, SAB Vol. II, 1877, p.311; L.S.S.O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer, Jessore*, 1912, p.128.
 29. SAB, Vol. IX, p.208; Vol. V, pp.231-32, 346, 468.
 30. For instance, seven gangs of Tuntia Musalmans operating in Bankura, Burdwan, Hooghly and Midnapore districts, e.g. gangs of Jiban Pathan, Punjab Khan, Pavan Khan, Kader Mallick, Dabir Mallick; three Bhumij gangs operating in above districts besides Manbhum and Singhbhum, e.g. gangs of Konthi Kotal, Hambir Singh and Dhiru Bhumij (of Suritari village); some Sandar gangs operating in Dacca, Bakarganj, Faridpur, Pabna and other eastern Bengal districts; some Lodha gangs operating in Midnapore district, e.g. gangs of Rati Laik, Dharma Lodha, Bistu Lodha etc: Bengal CID *Records on Gang Cases*.
 31. See for instance, GOB Home (Political) Notification No.5319-P dated 29. June 1914 and No.11252-P dated 23 November 1914, in Bengal CID *Report on the seven gangs of Tuntia criminals*, 1915.
 32. Jacques Pouchepadass, for instance, holds such a view. Jacques Pouchepadass, "The 'criminal tribes' of British India: a repressive concept in theory and practice", *International Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. II. No. 1, 1982, pp.4159.
 33. Kumudnath Mallik, *Nadia Kahini*; Bimalendu Koyal, "Bishe Dakat", *Jugantar* dated 22 November 1953; Mohit Roy, 'Kukhyata Daka' Biswanath", *Ananda Bazar Patrika* dated 13 October, 1961
 34. Jogendranath Gupta, *Banglar Dakat*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1388 B.S. reprint, pp.56-61, 82-89.

6 Communal Disorders

Let us make it clear that the phrase 'public order' itself is part of the official or ruling group's discourse, reflecting the value judgement of the latter as to the actions and behaviour patterns which are, or are not, to be construed as amounting to disorder. Public disorder, therefore, is a situation in which public order is violated or threatened. Public disorder, in turn, may be sub-divided into three types, in an ascending order in terms of the threat potential to the established order: (a) Breaches of law and order, like cases arising out of rioting over possession of land or rights of cultivation or share of crops and so on. These are not only localised but are also viewed by the administration as of less gravity. Such breaches nevertheless amount to public disorder. (b) Public disorder of greater magnitude which covers a fairly extensive area and involves a large number of people. The classic examples of this type are the protest movements of the indigo cultivators of Jessore and Nadia (1854-62) and of the ryots in Pabna (1872-73). Religion-based communal outbursts and disorders arising from unrest among the industrial workers in Bengal during our period also fall within this category. (c) The third type of public disorder is the one which poses a threat to the security of the State, at least that is how the situation is perceived by the administration or the ruling group. The anti-partition and swadeshi movement with its concomitance of terrorist outrages (1906 onwards) would come under this category.

'Public order' or 'public disorder' was not statutorily defined in India during British rule nor has this been done since Independence in 1947. However, the Constitution (First Amendment) Act of 1951 introduced the concept of public order, without giving it a legal definition, 'maintenance of public order' being one of the permissible

grounds for putting 'reasonable' restrictions on certain fundamental rights under Article 19 of the Constitution. In that amendment 'security of State' was also introduced as another circumscribing factor. Clarifying the distinction between law and order, public order and disorder affecting the security of the State, Justice Hidayatullah of the Indian Supreme Court observed: "Just as public order apprehends disorders of less gravity than those affecting the security of State, law and order also apprehends disorders of less gravity than those affecting public order. One has to imagine three concentric circles. Law and order represents the largest circle within which it is the next circle representing public order and the smallest circle represents security of State. It is then easy to see that an act may affect law and order but not public order, just as an act may affect public order but not the security of State".¹

Traditionally speaking, communalism implies social organisation on a community basis, characterised by collective ownership and use of property. Recent Indian history – from about the eighties of the nineteenth century – has given it a new twist. Social roots of communalism, according to an eminent historian, lay in the modern period. "Communalism is not a dinosaur, it is a modern animal, a very ferocious one and has sharp teeth".² In its current distorted meaning, communalism implies loyalty to a socio-political grouping based on religious affiliations and corresponding suspicion, fear and ill-will towards similar other groups.³

It would perhaps be desirable to make it clear that for the purpose of this study, and based on common usage too, communal disorder (and its synonym of communal riot) does not apply to clashes between two religious groups only but also to riotous conduct indulged in by a sizeable section of any particular denomination on an issue basically emanating from a religion-based communal feeling. Instances of the latter category were the May 1891 riots in Ultadanga-Shyambazar area of Calcutta over execution of an ejectment order of a court about a plot of land claimed to have been used as a mosque, and an almost identical issue in Tala area of Calcutta in June 1897 leading to widespread tension and quite a few deaths. In both these disorders the principal target of attack was the police which sought to give effect to the court's order.

II

The two major religious communities in Bengal have been the Hindus and the Muslims, and it is but natural that there could be instances of

friction between them. An extreme case brought to our notice in recent times relates to an incident of 1784 in which the Durga puja procession of Rama Kant Banerjee, a wealthy banian of Calcutta was attacked and the latter assembled "fifty or sixty armed peons and demolished all the Mohammedan dargahs they could find in the neighbourhood of Boitacannah". Subsequently a mob of about 3000 Muslims attacked the house of Sookmoyi Thakur of Bowbazar, plundered it of jewels, 5000 gold mohurs, Rs.8000/- in Company bonds and having killed two cows, were supposedly seen disappearing into a local Muslim school with their loot. Other Hindu houses were also attacked.⁴ We may cite two other incidents which took place during the first half of the nineteenth century. A group of Muslims attacked a group of Hindu worshippers at Chowk Chandni on the bank of the Ganges in Calcutta and destroyed certain articles of Durga puja on its first day (saptami). The victims informed the local police who promptly arrived at the scene and arrested all available miscreants who were later jailed or fined.⁵ The second known incident also took place during the Durga puja, the major Hindu religious festival in Bengal, when the image of the deity was damaged by some Muslims in Bakut village of Hooghly district in 1856. On the complaint of the worshipper, the magistrate took firm action and the accused persons were tried and punished with imprisonment.⁶

In other words, such incidents in Bengal were very few in number, mostly sporadic and not pre-planned and extremely localised in their impact. They did not seem to have caused any wider repercussion nor did they seem to have left behind lasting ill- feeling between the two religious communities. Major religious festivals of one religious community, used to be attended by those belonging to the other.⁷ The situation started changing in respect of both religious groups in Bengal during the second half of the nineteenth century. On the Muslim side, the fundamentalist Feraizi leader Dudu Miya (1819-1862) successfully utilised the grievances of the Muslim peasantry in eastern Bengal against the Hindu landlords largely on religious lines.⁸ Take, for instance, the introduction of *lungis* by the Feraizis. The most common items of dress in rural Bengal in the nineteenth century were the *dhoti*, worn with pleats both in front and at the back, and the *gamcha* (a coarse long towel) hung over the shoulder.⁹ The members of the upper-class Urdu-speaking Muslims (known as *ashrafs*, who considered themselves to be the true Muslims and looked down upon the Bengali-speaking Muslims including the lower class *atraps*) preferred to wear a *pajama* (a pair of

loose cotton trousers), *chapkan* (cotton coat), a turban and a pair of shoes on ceremonial occasions.¹⁰ The Feraizis made the first conscious attempt to change the style of wearing a dhoti by wrapping it round the middle as a *lungi* or a long skirt, to make it look different from the Bengali Hindu dress.¹¹

The fundamentalist-reformist appeals and campaigns of Islamization in Bengal gathered momentum towards the middle of the nineteenth century by rejecting virtually all that was Bengali in the life of a Muslim as somethings incompatible with the ideas and principles of Islam. The preachers' conception of an Islamic polity was based on a vague notion of the Middle Eastern values and it was their dream so to transform the lives of the ordinary Muslims that they conformed to trans-Indian pattern. "The new emphasis was on differentiating popular Islam in Bengal from the local cultural traditions, much of which now came to be closely identified with Hinduism and polytheism and therefore as anti-Islamic".¹² Rafiuddin Ahmed has convincingly analysed how this trend was skilfully exploited by the ashrafs (mostly Urdu-speaking upper-class Muslims) who had all along refused to integrate with Bengali life and tried hard to project their Urdu-based culture as the correct Islamic way of life; their zealous emulators included in particular the rising middle class among the local Muslims—the small landholders, the village priests and *kath* mollahs,¹³ and above all, the new urban educated who in their "search for respectability and a 'genuine' Islamic identity repudiated their Bengali origins and (tried to climb the) ashraf social ladder."¹⁴

By the closing years of the nineteenth century a new and powerful irredentism was gaining ground; its point of reference was the distant world of Muslim countries totally unconnected with the multiple problems in the daily life of Bengali Muslims. The constant harping on extra-territorial links created in the minds of the Muslim rural mass a vague yet persistent notion that perhaps most, if not all, Muslims were aliens in Bengal. Bengal to them thus became a non-Muslim land, "the Hindus alone were 'Bengalis', the Muslims being only 'Muslims', liberated from all local ethnic affiliations."¹⁵ The Urduized Muslim elite could now manipulate to their advantage the social insecurity of the less privileged as they knew that the cry of Islam above all others could be counted on to rally the Muslim masses closer to the ashraf at least for the time being. The weakness of this enforced *entente* between two incompatible cultures—one elitist, the other popular—was not recognised

at the time and it took more than half-a-century for the Bengali Muslims to realise that their Muslim identity was in no way inconsistent with their Bengali origin.¹⁶

The Bengali Hindu community too was undergoing far-reaching changes during the entire span of the nineteenth century. They also had their quota of *kath* mollahs in the shape of some obscurantist pundits and their patrons but they never had the unquestioned sway over the rural masses as the mollahs had over their Muslim brethren. Secondly, the upper castes (e.g. Brahmins, Kayasthas and Baidyas besides the Brahmos) as a group wielded much more social influence among the Hindu community than the professional priestly class. Thirdly, a vocal and educated middle class in the Bengali Hindu society had emerged during this period which was prepared to break out, gradually though, from the old religious orthodoxy. The nineteenth century reform movements among Bengali Hindus in the shape of abolition of suttee, restrictions on child marriage and encouragement for remarriage of widows etc. testify to this trend. The absence of a responsible intermediary group like the Hindu middle class was a structural weakness in Muslim society which retarded the growth of any understanding between the elite and the rural mass which continued to be under the iron-grip of the educationally backward mollahs. All these do not however add up to a negation of the hold of religious orthodoxy and obscurantism over the nineteenth century Hindu Bengali society. This explains why the cow-protection movement, initially launched in Punjab under the aegis of the Arya Samaj in 1882 could find its way, via UP and Bihar, into Bengal by about the early nineties. It may not be entirely conjectural, as we will see later in this chapter, that the flow of the virus of communal conflict, as distinct from sporadic and transient frictions between the Bengal Hindus and Muslims, was closely linked with the migration of up-country labourers precisely from these regions of UP and Bihar which were worst affected by the cow-protection movement and the Hindu-Muslim riots during the late nineteenth century.

III

From the nineties of the last century, however, public disorders arising out of sectarian communal sentiments assumed a new dimension in

different parts of India. They not only became more frequent but the extent of participation as well as the degree of violence increased, thereby posing a greater threat to public order now than during earlier decades. The serious communal outbreaks which took place in eastern UP in 1893 prompted the Secretary of State for India to express his concern about the greater frequency of Hindu-Muslim riots in different parts of India and he wanted the Government of India to report on the origins of such disturbances, the causes for their increasing frequency and the measures to deal with them. In its reply dated 27 December 1893, the Governor-General-in-Council referred to the "most serious riots – those in Rangoon, Bombay and certain districts of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh".¹⁷ Bengal did not figure in this; obviously the communal disorder of 1891 over the Nikaripara mosque in Shambazar (Calcutta) was of much less gravity compared to the others.

The above Despatch of the Government of India is a document of considerable historical importance in which the official views regarding the causes of contemporary Hindu-Muslim frictions were analysed for the first time in some depth. It can also be considered as a reasonably objective assessment of the situation. As such it merits more than a passing reference. The Government of India observed that religious disturbances had occurred in the past also in many places and that it would be "a mistake to suppose that under the native regime such occurrences were or are unknown". The ordinary course of things in a Native State, according to it, was that one or the other religion was dominant in the administration, and that the party professing the creed which was not that of the ruling power had to "submit to the loss of privileges which it would enjoy if it were in the ascendant". The Government of India held that this was the case in most Native States, whether Hindu or Muhammadan. "The condition of inferiority thus imposed on the partisans of one religion by those of the other (was) acquiesced in by the bulk of the population".¹⁸

As to the proximate causes of communal disturbances in India, the Despatch observed that religious disturbances in the past generally occurred when festivals or holidays of the two religions had, as they must periodically do owing to the nature of the Hindu and Muhammadan calendars, fallen at the same season, and when one party desired to lead a procession past places of worship belonging to the other, or looked upon festive celebrations as an offence during its own seasons of mourning. Another potent cause of quarrel between the two creeds was

the slaughter of kine, whether for food or sacrifice, by Musalmans. The strong religious sentiment felt on this subject by the Sikhs and the majority of Hindus was well-known and in Punjab previous to annexation, kine-slaughter was a capital offence; it was severely repressed and led to many executions.¹⁹

The Government of India ascribed the following reasons for the increased frequency of communal clashes: (a) Greater facilities for communication and interchange of news by post and telegraph made possible the quick spread of information about riots even in a remote part. Exaggerated reports of what had happened were spread and as most newspapers belonged to one or other of the contending parties, the accounts published were often highly coloured. This rapid dissemination of news and increasing activity of controversy, carried on through the press, by public meetings and by the address of itinerant preachers was in some respects a new feature in Indian life, and one which was likely to grow and add considerably to the difficulties of administration. (b) Another cause, according to the Government of India analysis, was "the greater forwardness of the Hindus in the race of life and their more active participation in the spirit and practice of modern political organisation". Education made more progress among the Hindus whereas the Muhammedans 'stood aloof'. Hence public employment and success in legal and other professions became to a great extent the exclusive possession of the Hindus. The effect of such exclusion, it held, was to embitter the minds of the Muhammedans against the Hindus. "How far this estrangement has led the more ignorant classes of Muhammedans to give vent to their right to slaughter kine, it is impossible to say, but we fear that such excesses have occasionally been committed." (c) The third cause which contributed to increased frequency of dissensions was ascribed to Hindu revivalism, "by which we mean the greater activity shown in propagating and promoting respect for the doctrines and observances of Hinduism as a reaction against the spread of religious indifference which was the first effect of western education."²⁰

IV

It may be worthwhile at this stage to make a detailed study of two major communal upheavals in Calcutta and one in rural eastern Bengal in order to focus on some of the distinctive features of such episodes of public

disorder – the intensity of communal passions over relatively minor issues, the noticeable affinity in the socio-economic background of the rioters, the course of events and the nature of disturbances associated with communal riots and the administrative handling of the same.

Tala riots (Calcutta), 1897 : The Tala riots, lasting for nearly 36 hours (from the dawn of 30 June till about 3 p.m. on 1 July 1897), were typical of the immigrant labourers' behaviour pattern. This incident caused widespread repercussion amongst the Muslim workers in the entire industrial belt around Calcutta and also created a sense of panic in the European community.²¹ This was also the first ever large-scale urban mob violence to break out in Calcutta. The Government's reactions were predictably sharp and swift, including full deployment of not only the Calcutta Police but also of a British army regiment in India for a number of days.²² It was a public disorder of an unprecedented dimension, "Calcutta never before witnessed such a reign of terror, such daring atrocities committed by the mob, such a parade of police and the military."²³

The genesis of this trouble lay in a small piece of land at Tala in the extreme north-eastern part of Calcutta. The land belonged to the Tagore Trust Estate of which Dunne (a Barrister) was the Receiver. A hut was built on this land by one Arman Golder who was sued, ejected and the possession given to the Receiver in December 1894 by the Civil Court. Subsequently another man called Himmat Khan who was reportedly living with Arman Goldar, erected a tiled hut on the same land. A suit for his ejectment was instituted but the defendant pleaded that the hut had been used as a place of public worship for more than 20 years and that the land did not belong to the Estate. The munsif, who made a local enquiry, decided in July 1895 that the land belonged to the Estate, that the tiled hut was not a place of public worship during the vacancy of Arman Goldar (who had died some months before this second suit) although he might have carried on private worship with his friends, and that it was Himmat Khan and others who had had public worship in the hut for about a year prior to this suit but without the permission or knowledge of the plaintiff. The munsif, therefore, decreed possession of the land to the plaintiff Receiver and ordered the defendants to pull down the hut and remove the materials within six months or else the plaintiff was to do so at the defendants' cost. The defendants did not comply with this order and the hut remained on the land. An appeal was preferred to the District Judge but dismissed by default. No further appeal was made to the High Court. The Receiver did not apply for possession for some

time in the expectation that Hinumat Khan would remove the hut. Eventually when this did not materialise, the Receiver applied to be placed in possession by the Civil Court. As opposition was feared, the Calcutta Police was pressed to support the civil court peon in giving possession to the Receiver and this was done on 28 June 1897.²⁴

On the night of 29 June the Commissioner of Police (C.P.) learnt that about 2000 Muhammedans had collected at the spot to rebuild the 'hut or so-called mosque'. He sent a police party to that place and also alerted the military. The mob was dispersed at dawn of 30 June; at noon another large mob collected and attacked a police picket at Tala Pumping Station. A detachment of the Gloucestershire Regiment also proceeded to the spot and eventually the mob was dispersed by the police. Thereafter rioting spread to a much wider area of Calcutta covering Shambazar, Upper Circular Road, Rajabazar, Narkeldanga, Gas Street, Beliaghata, College Street, Mechuabazar and Chitpur Road, areas which had pockets of upcountry Muslims in good numbers. It was basically a hit-and-run confrontation between the rioters and the police, lasting for about a day and a half. The number of rioters killed was 11 including 5 whose bodies were taken away and disposed of by their own people; the number of rioters wounded by gunshots was estimated at about 20. Some unofficial reports put the casualty figure at anything between 300 and 900. Six criminal cases were instituted by the police. Out of the 87 persons sent up for trial, 81 were convicted, 5 discharged and 1 acquitted, and appeals in all cases were dismissed.

As regards the composition of the rioters, the Commissioner of Police reported that they were mostly low-class Muhammedan weavers and brick-layers who were joined by bad characters of the disturbed areas. Other available evidence shows that the bulk of the rioters were poor up-country Muslim migrants including masons, coolies, jetty workers, sorters in jute presses and jute mill workers.²⁵ After the turmoil had settled down the Government of India drew satisfaction from three features of the case: "The first is that we have now got it absolutely clear that no man can build a mosque on another man's land. The second that though it was a riot against authority, and the European must always bear the brunt as the representative of authority, it was not a racial rising and Natives and Europeans were equally maltreated. The third is that there was no looting of houses".²⁶

Its repercussion on the mills and factories in and around Calcutta was extensive. On hearing about the Tala incident, the workers (presumably Muslim workers) struck work at six jute mills in Kankinara,

Jagatdal and Shamnagar areas of 24-Parganas and resumed work only on 7 July, i.e. after about a week. The mill owners were much alarmed and military detachments had to be despatched to Kankinara, Shamnagar, Kharda and several other places. Even after the riot at Calcutta had been suppressed by about 2 July, the tension continued among the Muslim workers in the mills and factories around Calcutta, especially in the Barrackpore sub-division of 24-Parganas district. The excitement came to a head on the morning of 6 July when a letter allegedly written by Haji Zakaria reached the Muslim workers of Kankinara Jute Mills, in which all the Muslims were called upon to join the Tala rioters. The Muslim workers immediately struck work and this excitement spread to most of the neighbouring mills. It assumed quite a serious dimension in the Alliance Jute Mills where, according to the management, a gang of persons not belonging to this particular mill and armed with lathis attacked the gate, broke it open and surrounded the mill. Soon afterwards the engine house was attacked, large quantities of bricks thrown at the engine, the governor gear was broken and other damage done. The European managers of the mill fired "a few rounds of snipe shots" on two occasions to protect themselves and the mill and then the rioters retired to a safe distance. Thereafter the managers called two of their leaders to state their grievance, which were to the effect that the managers were very much at fault for not having stopped the Mill at 6 o'clock to allow all Muhammedan workers to march on to Calcutta to riot against the Government.²⁷

In the end, however, the excitement about the mill hands about Barrackpore turned out to have been much exaggerated. Nevertheless, the military had to be deployed who turned back without difficulty the Muslim workers on their way to Calcutta. The Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA) was not slow in capitalising on this situation to strengthen the police cover for the jute mill areas. In its letter dated 14 July 1897 addressed to the Bengal Government, the IJMA drew the Government's attention to the Id-ul-Fitr and the Bakr-Id disturbances of 1895 and 1896 at Titagarh. Referring to the attack on the Alliance Jute Mills (Jagatdal) on 6 July 1897, the IJMA pointed out the involvement of a large crowd of Muhammedans, computed at from two to three thousand, armed with lathis, who succeeded in causing considerable damage and attempted to burn down the coolie lines. In most of these incidents, it reiterated, the police could reach the spot after considerable delay. The IJMA suggested that a time had come for a revision of the

disposition of police force and that a force of military police would be better calculated than ordinary constables to cope with this type of riots.²⁸

The Bengal Government promptly set up a five-member Committee for the Redistribution of Police in Bengal,²⁹ to examine the deployment of police in the industrial belt. Its report, submitted on 28 February 1898, surveyed the labour scene in the 24-Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly districts having a total of 64 mills employing over 1,00,000 labourers of whom nearly 40% were Muslims and the rest Hindus. It also showed that nearly 60% of the workers were of up-country origin.³⁰ The Committee held that the force of 931 constables and town chaukidars in the mill areas was deployed exclusively on ordinary town duties and could not be available for the suppression of disturbances on a large scale. It, therefore, recommended the formation of an additional company of the Bengal Military Police to be stationed on the river bank near Barrackpore so that it could be easily and rapidly moved by water to any disturbed spot; it further recommended the augmentation of the Howrah District Armed Police Reserve from 1 S.I., 2 Head Constables, 20 Constables to 2 S.I.s, 4 H.Cs. and 50 Constables.

The Bengal Government fully supported these recommendations. In fact, the Lt. Governor felt that the proposals did not go far enough, having regard to the large number of mill hands employed in the neighbourhood of the metropolis, a large proportion of which consisted of up-country Muhammedans, to their excitable character, to the trouble which could suddenly arise at any time, whether through disputes between Muhammedans and Hindus on some religious question or through religious excitement among the Muhammedans due to some other cause, to the enormous value of the mill and factory property and to the necessity for giving confidence to industrial enterprise. The Government held, inter alia, that it was very desirable that disturbances should, in the first instance, be dealt with by the police, and that the aid of the military should be called in 'only in the last extremity'.³¹

The Government of India's reaction to this proposal was equally supportive. Besides these approximately one lakh mill hands, there were large number of coolies employed on the brick fields and elsewhere south of Calcutta. "These people are occasionally a danger to the metropolis as well as to their employers. There is a tendency for them to increase in numbers and in power of combination with the increasing industrial activity of this part of Bengal. It is unlikely that their excitability or

fanaticism will decrease. A strong police force is necessary to control them when they misbehave." The proposed increase was, therefore, considered fully justified.³²

Bakr-Id riots in Chitpur (Calcutta), 1910 : The proximate cause of the trouble was the proposed cow-slaughter by the Muslims in a mosque at 16, Armenian Street in an area largely inhabited by Marwari Hindus. According to the Marwari residents of the locality, cow-slaughter was being organised in this mosque for the first time and they sought the intervention of the Government and the Police Commissioner to stop it. Failing to elicit any favourable response from the Government, the Marwaris resorted to closing down of shops in protest, including those owned by Muslims, on 8 and 9 December. Serious tension developed in both the communities but the administration failed to react initially and did not take adequate precautionary steps like rounding up of anti-social and criminal elements, posting of police pickets and patrols etc. From the early morning of 10 December skirmishes between groups of Marwaris and Muslims (mostly *Kabulis*, i.e. migrant Muslims from Kabul) broke out. A wide area covering College Street, Colootola Street, Harrison Road, Chitpur Road, Armenian Street, Tara Chand Lane and Mechua Bazar Street became the scene of rioting and looting on 10 and 11 December. Conflicting accounts are available as to how exactly the initial spark was provided but the official view put the blame on the Marwaris. Subsequent depredations were, however, largely committed by gangs of *Kabulis* whose primary objective appeared to be looting and destruction of property.³³

At least four persons (2 Hindus and 2 Muslims) were killed in the rioting of the two days and scores of others received serious injuries. The military (16th Cavalry) was called out in aid of the civil police on 10 December.

The Chitpur riots created considerable unrest among the mill hands as would be evident from the following facts: At 8 p.m. on 12 December (i.e. the day preceding the *kurbani* day) the Naval Volunteers (European) numbering 400 guarded the riverside from Cossipore to Kidderpore to prevent any landing of mill hands from Barrackpore, Naihati, Shamnagar and Titagarh. A large number of Gorkha military police, stationed at Alipore, were sent to Titagarh as a riot was apprehended among the labourers there. The District Magistrate of 24-Parganas went round the industrial belt of his district on 12 December

to make sure that there was no unusual influx of Muhammedans into Calcutta on the *kurbani* day (13 December). Armed Police was posted at important points. Similar precautions were taken in Howrah and Hooghly districts. The services of the Sikh Regiment, then encamped at Serampore, were also requisitioned. Most of the important ferry ghats alongside the river in Hooghly and Howrah districts were guarded by police.

The above two major riots have some notable features in common. Firstly, communal passions were aroused and instigated in both cases by non-Bengali elements – a number of Muslim preachers and lawyers in the Tala incident, and the Marwari business community in the Bakr-Id incident (1910). Secondly, the rioters in both cases were, again, non-Bengali Hindus and Muslims, and thirdly, both riots witnessed the large involvement of migrant workers of various categories—masons, coolies, brick-layers and others besides mill workers, though the Kabulis (vendors, petty money-lenders) took a leading part in the 1910 Bakr-Id riot. Fourthly, the Muslim mill hands in and around Calcutta on both occasions displayed intense communal feelings which, in turn, created great panic among the European community. This led to heavy deployment of European and Gorkha military regiments and patrolling along the Ganga river by the European Naval Volunteers. The overall administrative reaction on both occasions was a firm stand against rioting with massive deployment of military and police contingents, though an initial ambivalence in the handling of the 1910 episode led to the outbreak of violence.

However, in certain respects the Tala riot of 1897 differed from the Chitpur Bakr-Id riot of 1910. There was no looting of Hindu or Muslim houses and shops in the Tala case nor were the attacks by the Muslim mobs directed specifically against Hindus. Secondly, it was largely in the nature of scattered skirmishes between the Muslim rioters and the Police. These two features of the Tala riot have led some scholars to hold that it was not a typical communal riot.³⁴ Though partially true, the fact remains that the violence was resorted to by members of one particular religious community and it arose out of undeniable communal passions fanned by a known group of communalists like Haji Zakaria and others. Besides, its extensive repercussions among migrant Muslim workers in the industrial belt surrounding Calcutta had an unmistakable communal overtone, totally unrelated to industrial relations.

Bakshiganj-Dewanganj communal outrages, May 1907 (Mymensingh district) : Dewanganj was a police station under

Jamalpur sub-division of Mymensingh district. Bakshiganj, at a distance of about eight miles from the thana, happened to be a prosperous village under Dewanganj police station with a fairly large market (*ganj*). Tracing the previous history of local feud in Bakshiganj, the District Magistrate (Clarke) reported in May 1907 that one Balai Sarkar, a Muslim jotedar (landlord) of the place, was the lessee of the market place (*hat*), which contained some Marwari and Muslim shops besides 12 big shops belonging to the Hindu Sahas. Balai reportedly had a quarrel with the Sahas about some site in the bazar, with the result that they boycotted him. One Lakhi Kanta, a leading Saha, also an enthusiast in the swadeshi cause, invited two Maulavis from Calcutta to lecture and asked both Hindus and Mussalmans to attend. The meeting took place on the 2nd March, 1907, and, according to official report, it was poorly attended and the Mussalmans were said to have stayed away chiefly on account of the use of the word 'Bande Mataram' on the invitation. Maulavi Din Mohammed and Barada Prasanna Roy addressed the meeting but the same was obviously disturbed by some designing Muslims as would be evident from the classic understatement by the DM: "The Police report that some Mussalmans dispersed the meeting peacefully and asked Din Mohammed not to associate with the idolators."³⁵

The Sub-divisional Officer visited Bakshiganj after more than a month of the above incident and he found Hindus and Mussalmans on good terms except for the "quarrel of Balai Sarkar" with the Sahas. Subsequent developments in this place and its adjoining areas will show how superficial, if not motivated, the above assessment of the local situation was. Without any provocation – for, no official report could cite any—on the night of 1st May, 1907, Hindu shops in Bakshiganj bazar were looted and a *Kalibari* (temple of goddess Kali) was destroyed along with the deity. The very next day telegrams were received by the thana and also by the District Magistrate who was then camping at the sub-divisional headquarters of Jamalpur (19 miles from Bakshiganj) but none went to the scene of such carnage. According to the DM's own admission, "The Sub-Inspector of Dewanganj was ordered to proceed there at once, but both he and his head constable reported themselves ill and did nothing."

The next day (i.e. on 2nd May), when the *hat* was on, the same band of people again attacked the *Kalibari* and threw the images outside. They then turned to the Sahas' shops and looted these shops from 2 till 8 pm; at least 12 of the Sahas' shops were completely gutted. Most

of the Hindu residents fled from their homes in panic. The riotous mob also made at least three attacks on the kutcherry of the Tagore estate. "It is noticeable", official reports admitted, "that the rioters did not touch the shops of the Marwari and Muhammadans". The rioters then went to the nearby village Meshha Char half a mile away and ransacked the Hindu houses. (One would be quite amused at the manner in which the DM described this attack and ransacking: "The rioters ... broke into some Madahs' houses and did a certain amount of mischief"). As if to prove that the mighty administration did not exist, the same band of people went to Charhouna, a village on the other side of Bakshiganj, plundered some more Hindu houses and then went to a neighbouring village called Mali Char and perpetrated similar depredations.

Such outrages were not confined to the above places only nor were the scenes of depredations localised under Dewanganj police station areas. At least 33 villages, spread over Jamalpur, Madarganj, Sherpur and Dewanganj police stations of Jamalpur sub-division, and Fulpur police station of Sadar sub-division of Mymensingh district were ravaged by marauding gangs of one particular community and all the victims belonged to the other community. And what is worse, this lasted unhindered from the 30th of April till at least the 10th of May, 1907. There were a number of instances where the same village was subject to such pillage at different times of the day and night and also on subsequent dates. It is also interesting to observe that between the 28th of April and the 2nd of May, the Divisional Commissioner (Nathan) and the District Magistrate (Clarke) were both camping at Jamalpur, only about 19 miles away, with about 40 Gorkha Military Police personnel. The DM paid a cursory visit to Bakshiganj only on the 4th of May, returned to Jamalpur the same day and sent from there "12 of the armed (sic) police with a head constable ... They were unfortunately armed only with lathis, their rifles having been left in Mymensingh."

That there was no evidence of any will on the part of the administration to resist the onslaughts on the Hindu community which had been spearheading the swadeshi and anti-partition agitation should be apparent from the chain of uninterrupted incidents. The suspicion about its connivance at such violence gets reinforced when one learns that a number of such incidents of serious nature were preceded by public announcements by the ringleaders that "the British Government and the Nawab (of Dacca) had given orders for the oppression of Hindus"³⁶

In course of the above orgy of communal violence, there were several cases of rape and other forms of outrages against women and attempted forcible conversion of Hindus. Quite predictably, the official

reports tried to play down these outrages to the extent possible. In spite of this, one may find evidence of such crimes from certain stray remarks in some reports, and the panic and the utter lawlessness stalking the countryside would be evident from the Commissioner's admission that in several of the disturbances in the villages, the rioters called out for the women but the people usually had warning and fled with their womenfolk before the rioters came. Two cases of abduction were committed to the Sessions Court but no case of rape was "instituted". The Commissioner indirectly admitted such outrages on women but tried to shrug them off: "From the reports I have received, it seems likely that a few cases of rape did occur, not as part of the general raiding but as the work of some of the younger badmashes who broke loose after the attacks on the bazars."³⁷

The Bakshiganj-Dewanganj communal outrages in the Jamalpur sub-division of Mymensingh district stand out in sharp contrast with the Tala and Chitpur episodes. The communal instigators were a mixed lot of non-Bengali and Bengali Muslims, though the actual participants were mostly local Bengali Muslims. There is no indication from the official reports of any noticeable involvement of immigrants. Secondly, one can discern a fair degree of advance preparation through extensive distribution of communally inflammatory leaflets and preachings of itinerant Maulavis. The third notable feature of the Mymensingh carnage was the extensive looting of property, desecration and destruction of places of worship, outrages against women and a certain amount of attempted forcible conversion of Hindus. Finally, one is struck by the callous passivity of the administration in handling this protracted series of outrages lasting for about a fortnight, especially when it is contrasted with the vigorous and ruthless suppression of the Tala and Chitpur episodes which pale into insignificance in terms of the human suffering of innocent victims.

V

Some of the peculiar characteristics and the escalating level of communal friction in Bengal beginning with the last decade of the nineteenth century call for a special probe. This phenomenon can best be analysed if the principal communal outbursts are clustered under two different periods: (a) a 14-year pre-partition period (1891-1904), and (b) an 8-year

partition period (1905-1912). This periodisation is important: both quantitatively and qualitatively the communal outbursts of the partition era were distinctly different from those of the earlier period.

So far as the pre-partition communal outbursts are concerned, there may be a large measure of validity in the Government of India's 1893 analysis of the causes of such friction. But this fails to account for two special features of such incidents in Bengal – their predominantly urban locale and the almost exclusive participation by up-country migrant labourers. These two, however, are linked issues – the affected industrial-urban pockets were also the places where these migrant labourers were concentrated. Hence an explanation for the latter characteristic (involvement of migrant workers) will also account for the other feature (industrial-urban locale).

The explanation offers itself at two inter-linked planes — economic and psycho-social. In the second half of the nineteenth century Bengal witnessed considerable increase in railway and other construction activities and the launching of colonial industrial enterprises like jute and cotton mills, engineering and coal mining units etc. The growing demand for labour led to an influx of migrant workers, both Hindus and Muslims, from U.P. and Bihar where the wages of agricultural labourers were much less than those prevailing in Bengal. A comparative wage structure of a Bengal district and those of Bihar and U.P. from which the bulk of the migrant influx took place will make it clear:

TABLE 6.1
Monthly wage rates of agricultural labourers in selected districts

| | 1880 | 1890 | 1894 |
|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| | Rs. - as | Rs. - as | Rs. - as |
| Burdwan (Bengal) | 9 - 0 | 8 - 0 | 7 - 0 |
| Patna (Bihar) | 3 - 4 | 4 - 5 | 4 - 5 |
| Muzaffarpur (Bihar) | 2 - 3 | 3 - 5 | 3 - 8 |
| | | | to |
| | | | 5 - 6 |
| Hazaribagh (Bihar) | 4 - 0 | 4 - 5 | 5 - 6 |
| Kanpur (U.P.) | 3 - 9 | 4 - 0 | 4 - 5 |
| Mirzapur (U.P.) | 3 - 3 | 3 - 8 | 4 - 0 |
| Lucknow (U.P.) | 3 - 0 | 4 - 0 | 4 - 0 |

Source : *Labour Commission Report, 1896*

The flow of immigrants increased considerably during the last two

decades of the nineteenth century, especially in the districts in which the tempo of construction and industrial activity was pronounced — 24-Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly, Calcutta and Burdwan. Due to the operation of the *sardari* system of labour induction and supervision,³⁸ the respective denominational groups not only brought with them their traditional social and religious practices and dogmas but were also apt to develop a community consciousness typical of a migrant social group in their respective *mohallas* (dwelling settlements). Largely due to this *mohalla* system of settlement, these migrant clusters could not achieve the necessary assimilation with their migrant colleagues belonging to the other religious denomination;³⁹ in most cases neither of these groups could also be integrated with the locals. Added to this psychology of relative isolation were the poor living conditions, lack of recreational facilities, long spells of separation from family,⁴⁰ monotonous and at times an exacting work schedule. All these factors led to the formation of a highly unstable and excitable industrial work force.⁴¹ If to such an unstable and volatile mass are added the ingredients of a new ideological influence (e.g. pan-Islamism so far as the Muslim migrants were concerned) and religious revivalism (e.g. the movement against cow slaughter spearheaded by the Arya Samaj among the Hindus, especially in Punjab, UP and Bihar), these could not but lead to an intensification of mutual distrust and antagonism. It could not be a mere coincidence, therefore, that the participants in the late nineteenth century communal disorders in Bengal were from those migrant groups — Hindus and Muslims — who generally hailed from districts like Ballia, Benaras, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur (all in U.P.), Arrah, Saran, Gaya and Patna (all in Bihar), the districts which were the worst affected by communal riots between 1883 and 1893.

There is yet another possible explanation for the contiguance of the community or communal identity of the migrant groups. The Bengali *bhadralok* class — the main political group in Bengal at that time — hardly cared to bridge the socio-cultural gap between these migrant groups and their local social counterparts by infusing the required degree of political consciousness which could have helped in transcending communal consciousness.⁴² On the other hand, a group of Muslim traders and elites in Bengal, enthused by contemporary pan-Islamism, maintained some form of contact with the upcountry Muslim workers. This also helped to foster and strengthen a community consciousness among them which, at times of strain, replaced the slowly emerging working class solidarity. This was quite apparent during the communal outbursts of both pre- and post-partition years.

The main features of the communal disorders during the two periods may be summed up thus: (a) A total of 6 disturbances were recorded in as many number of places during the fourteen years of the pre-partition period as against over 250 incidents involving nearly 200 towns and villages during the 8-year partition period. (b) Such disorders during the first period were almost exclusively confined to urban pockets, whereas the later ones were more numerous in rural areas. (c) Barring two instances in which the proximate cause for trouble arose out of dispute over a hut (whether it was used as a place of public worship by Muslims),⁴³ the remaining four incidents of the pre-partition period centered round cow-slaughter during Bakr-Id. In the partition period, only about 3 incidents arose out of cow-slaughter and the rest were not connected in any with observance of religious rites. (d) The participants on both sides in the pre-partition communal riots were almost exclusively up-country migrant workers from U.P. and Bihar; 4 out of the 6 incidents took place in the vicinity of workers' colonies. On the other hand, during the post-partition riots, migrant workers were involved in two or three incidents only, whereas the miscreants in all the other cases were local inhabitants. The 1910 Calcutta riots were largely confined to Kabuli Musalmans and Marwaris. Sikhs of an army unit were suspected in one of the Calcutta incidents of 1910 in which cattle meant for slaughter were forcibly 'rescued' from an Alipore mosque.⁴⁴

We have earlier touched upon the impact of the cow protection movement among the Hindu migrant workers from UP and Bihar. Even some up-country policemen were found to be affected by this, which was evident in an incident at Beliaghata during the 1910 Bakr-Id disturbances. Forty railway policemen (2 head-constables and 38 constables) and a railway employee, all up-countrymen, joined the mob in attacking the Muhammedans to prevent cow-slaughter.⁴⁵ Two constables and the railway watchman (Mahadeo Singh) were arrested on the spot and the rest marched off to the Police Lines. Six constables and the railway watchman were prosecuted and convicted; departmental enquiry proceedings were held against 36 out of which 33 were found guilty of misconduct and insubordination and were dismissed from service. All the involved railway policemen were Bihari Hindus.⁴⁶

(e) In two of the six riots of the first period, the skirmishes were almost exclusively confined to the Muslims and the police; in the remaining five cases the police intervened as a third party to subdue the

rioters. In the post-partition period riots, there was hardly any incident in which there was a direct confrontation between the police and the rioters. (f) Looting and destruction of property were minimal in the pre-partition riots, and there was no incidence of attack on places of worship (Hindu or Muslim) nor were there any outrages against women. During the second phase (1905-12), looting, arson and other forms of destruction of property were very extensive, the victims being almost exclusively Hindus. Outrages against women (rape and abduction) and attacks on Hindu idols and places of worship were another new feature of this period – the victims, again, were exclusively Hindus. (g) Another notable feature of the partition period communal riots is that, except about six, the remaining nearly 224 cases took place in the eastern Bengal districts of the newly formed Muslim-majority province.

VI

What were the forces at work in relation to the orgy of communal violence during the partition years? An important clue to this can be found as we dissect the administration's perception of the problem. In an official communication of July 1906 the main causes of communal disorders in Eastern Bengal were summarised as follows : (1) Pressure was being put by Hindu landlords upon their Muslim tenants to use only country-made goods and to prevent the sale of imported articles. (2) Such action on the part of the landlords stirred up various agrarian grievances of long standing. (3) The formation of a 'Muhammedan province' indirectly stimulated the ambition of the Muslims to improve their social status. (4) The efforts of the younger generation of educated Muslims to improve the condition of their co-religionists tended to generate a strong anti-Hindu feeling. (5) The "fanatical tendencies of the Muslims of East Bengal" were "greatly stimulated of late years by the influence of pilgrims who have returned from Mecca." In their anxiety to "raise the standard of orthodoxy ... they are strongly opposed to the Hindus and are constantly stirring up enmity against them".⁴⁷

Almost identical pleas were offered by the Bengal administration a year later after the prolonged and widespread spell of assault, looting, arson etc. in Mymensingh district during April-May 1907. In its report dated 17 August 1907, the Eastern Bengal and Assam Government stated that it fully shared the views of Nathan (officiating Commissioner of

Dacca division) that the anti-partition agitation and the "attempts made in connection with it to put pressure upon the Mohammedan ryots to join with the Hindu pleaders, money lenders and zamindari amla, who form the backbone of the anti-Government party in this as in other districts, has been a predominating cause in producing the disturbances."⁴⁸

Government reports tried to play down the role of fanatical preachers by stating that the question of how far the preaching of Muhammedan Maulavis in the remoter villages had tended to promote the outbreak was one into which the Lt. Governor had caused careful enquiries to be made and he was satisfied that though in some cases, especially in the later stages of the disturbances, the ryots were encouraged in this menace, such preaching was in no way the general cause of the outbreaks as a whole. Where the outbreaks were not spontaneous outbreaks of irritation and excitement stimulated by greed, they were "promoted by knavish adventurers who saw a chance of plunder and perhaps revenge for personal grievances." It was admitted that these persons in some instances asserted that the Government and the Nawab of Dacca had given them authority to loot Hindus and to carry off their women but there was not "the slightest reason for supposing that they themselves believed in anything of the kind", and then the Government advanced the contrived logic that this "trick was obviously suggested to them by the wild stories to this effect which the Calcutta and local papers were publishing all over the country".⁴⁹

Though the Government's case was largely built on an equally tendentious report of Nathan, its veracity can be seriously questioned even on the basis of some facts and circumstances contained in Nathan's report itself, besides other official reports. Thus the dubious role of the Maulavis and other preachers can be gathered from the bits and pieces of information in Nathan's report. For instance, shortly before the rioting at Bakshiganj, a Mohammedan Maulavi named Akbar Ali Munshi held a meeting near Bakshiganj at which he exhorted the audience to stop payment of Iswar Britti and the rioting began by an attack upon the idol which had been allegedly erected by the Iswar Britti. Under Sherpur Police station (Jamalpur sub-division) some meetings were held by the Maulavis before violence broke out in the areas. Under Nalitabari P.S. (Jamalpur sub-division) meetings were held by the Maulavis in several villages in which it was decided to loot the houses of Rajendra Mallick of Pikara and of the Saha mahajans of Bangaon bazar. "It was also suggested in these meetings that in order to pick a quarrel, they should

demand a *hookah* to smoke from the Hindus which would certainly be objected to by the latter." One Abdur Rahaman of Patbassi preached and incited against the Hindus shortly before that village was looted by Mohammedans on 6 May 1907.⁵⁰

Yet Nathan observed that the rumour regarding itinerant Maulavis inflaming their co-religionists "was found to be without substantial foundation". In a similarly twisted logic Nathan stated first that the "Religious fanaticism does not appear to have been a primary motive in the disturbances" and then went on to contradict himself by observing that "as was to be expected in a Mohammedan outbreak cases of such fanaticism began before long to appear." The most remarkable instance was the riot at Melamganj (Jamalpur sub-division) where the Mohammedan mob smashed the Kalibari near the market and then went from dwelling to dwelling destroying the family idols. In his judgement the trying magistrate stated that the accused were all respectable citizens but appeared to "have been carried away by a wave of iconoclastic fanaticism." In several other cases attempts were made forcibly to convert Hindus.

Even prior to the Jamalpur communal riots of April-May 1907, similar activities of Muslim preachers and their incitements to foment communal frenzy are on record. Maulavi Samiruddin (a local preacher) and Dinesh Niyogi (a recent convert to Islam) were known to have been actively propagating hatred against the Hindus just before the May 1906 communal outbreaks which convulsed many villages under the Iswarganj and Nandail police stations of Mymensingh district.⁵¹ Similarly, the March 1907 looting and violence in Mogra bazar (Tripura) were preceded by a series of meetings in which anti-Hindu hatred was preached in the name of 'Muslim awakening'.⁵² The initial report about the communal outbreak in Phulpur attributed it mainly to the "preaching of Muhammedan fanatics who have been going about urging Muhammedans to convert all Hindus to their faith."⁵³

It was officially known that numerous parwanas and notices in mosques and other public place were in circulation for long inciting hatred of and attack on Hindus which stated, inter alia, that the Government and the Nawab of Dacca supported them.⁵⁴ According to one officer, 'the immediate cause' of the widespread violence in Dewanganj and Munshiganj areas of Jamalpur sub-division from 1 - 10 May, 1907 was this 'infamous report spread by the bad characters'.⁵⁵ Two such pamphlets received wide circulation - *Nawabsaheber*

Subichar (Justice by the Nawabsaheb of Dacca) and *Lal Istehar* (Red Pamphlet). The former came to public notice in March 1906 and then followed the first outbreak in Iswarganj in May 1906. The Red Pamphlet is also believed to have been circulated around the same time. The Government reported subsequently that copies of *Nawabsaheber Subichar* were confiscated, but it was obviously done much later and only after it had received wide publicity. The manner in which the administration reacted to the even more inflammatory Red Pamphlet is quite revealing. In the earlier case the author could not be pinpointed but in this case its author – publisher Ibrahim Khan was let off by the Mymensingh Magistrate (Clarke) on the basis of a simple bail bond and the case against him was dropped. Commenting on this an official of the Government of India was constrained to remark that it was "most injudicious and ultra vires on the part of the Magistrate to have dropped the case, and that the bail bond was not worth the paper it was written on."⁵⁶

At this stage we may further examine the principal causative factors behind the Mymensingh communal carnage as put forward by the administration and also by some scholars. No one can deny the none-too-satisfactory relationship between the landholders (most of them being Hindus) and the peasantry (the middle and the lower peasantry and the landless labourers, most of whom were Muslims). But to assign a place of primacy to the agrarian dimension to the virtual exclusion of other factors may be a good exercise in an attempt to establish 'subaltern autonomy' but it amounts to sidetracking the very crucial issue of communal fanaticism. If these outrages are to be portrayed as instances of burgeoning peasant consciousness or subaltern autonomy, one would have expected its appearance in areas which had earlier displayed such traits in some concrete form – in Nadia, Jessore and Pabna, for instance, where the peasantry had effectively combined against the indigo planters and the native landholders respectively.

In focussing on the agrarian dimension of this series of communal riots in Mymensingh and Tippera districts during 1906-07, one scholar has observed that "Over large parts of East Bengal the discontent of the largely Muslim peasantry found articulation in the form of communalism with Hindu gentry, traders and moneylenders as the principal targets".⁵⁷ This could have been only partly true. For, there were many victims (all Hindus) who do not fit into the description of being either landholders or traders or moneylenders. One may cite any number of instances which

would indicate that contrary to a currently prevalent notion, ordinary poor Hindus – as distinct from the landholder-trader-moneylender triad – had also been the victims of communal violence. The following samples are all drawn from the riot-torn Jamalpur subdivision. In village Kamarerchar, the houses of Ganga Ram, Gouri and Ramchandra Madah, all low-caste Hindus, were looted on 30 April 1907. Likewise, on 3 May 1907 the house of Gobinda Muchi in village Malamari was looted. The houses of Hari Tambuli and eight others in village Janakipur and those of eight goalas in village Patharshi were subjected to similar looting on 3 May and 5 May 1907 respectively. On 5 May again, the house of one Bairagi of Kalikapur and that of Chandra Mohan Majhi in Dakatia were looted. The house of Khedu Muchi was looted, his wife dragged away and a hut destroyed by arson in village Pararchar on 7 May 1907.⁵⁸

Some historians have played up, almost to the point of obscuring the significant fact of strong communal sentiments, the instances in which the shops of the Sahas were attacked or those in which Hindu idols were broken as if to show that the former were penalised for their moneylending practices and the latter were destroyed because of the Iswarbritti cess.⁵⁹ It has also been suggested that Musalmans and Marwaris were robbed nearly as much as Bengali Hindus.⁶⁰ Half a dozen of such instances out of nearly 200 do not surely prove the above contention that the miscreants were quite secular and indiscriminating in their plunder and destruction.⁶¹ Such a view-point conveniently omits quite a few pertinent facts.

By way of refuting an apparently fragmented representation of historical events, we would cite the following additional facts out of many similar cases : The first act of desecration and destruction of an ancient Hindu idol situated in an equally ancient place of worship took place in Jamalpur on 21 April, 1907. Not even official reports sought to justify this sacrilege on the ground of Iswar Britti.⁶² Secondly, the houses of eight Goalas (low caste Hindus) were looted and the idols mutilated in village Patharshi (Jamalpur sub-division) on 5 May 1907.⁶³ Surely the Goalas could not have levied this cess for erecting these idols. Thirdly, the Marwaris were not accused in any of the official reports as having taken any part in the swadeshi movement. On the contrary they must have resented the boycott of foreign goods as it adversely affected their trade in such goods. If there were any incidents of attack on their shops or houses, these were rare and incidental. An official report clearly mentioned that the Marwari shops were mixed up with the Saha's in

Bakshiganj but none of the former category was touched by the violence witnessed during 1 - 2 May 1907.⁶⁴ In the fourth place, the fact remains that both Marwaris and Sahas carried on with their customary money lending business—in cash or in kind. But there were systematic depredations against the Sahas, to the exclusion of the other group. Such attacks against the Sahas have been sought to be rationalised on the ground of their moneylending practices. Our case study of the Bakshiganj-Dewanganj communal outrages in Mymensingh district (April - May, 1907) has brought out enough facts and circumstances to belie such a contention. It is quite evident that the Sahas of Bakshiganj were subjected to plunder and assault not because they were money-lenders but because of other reasons, principally their association with the swadeshi movement and their conflict with a leading Muslim landholder.

This takes us to another 'causative' factor behind the crop of communal orgies which were mainly directed against the Bengali Hindus who were admittedly involved in a big way in the swadeshi and anti-partition movements against the Government. As we have seen earlier, the administration had been harping, right from 1906, on the theme that the "pressure put by Hindu landlords upon their Muslim tenants to use only country-made goods and to prevent the sale of imported articles" was causing resentment among the latter.⁶⁵ It is indeed a fact that the manner in which boycotting was being enforced by bands of overzealous swadeshi volunteers led to some of the earlier skirmishes, specially at Mogra bazar and at the Jamalpur mela ground.⁶⁶ The above official argument underwent a significant change after the April-May 1907 disturbances in Mymensingh district. Now the Government was talking not merely of the amorphous Hindu landlords causing irritation to their tenants but of pressurising the "Muhammedan ryots to join with the Hindu pleaders, moneylenders and zamindari amla who formed the *backbone of the anti-government party* in this as in other districts as the predominating cause in producing the disturbances."⁶⁷ The focus was now sharper: the anti-partition agitation was not to be viewed as a simple public order issue of the earlier years but as a definite anti-Government movement. It was, therefore, a public disorder situation with a distinctive threat to the security of the ruling group, and hence no holds were barred in administrative responses even if that meant conniving at the sedulously built-up communal frenzy or the organised attacks against those who dared to defy the governmental authority. They had to be taught a lesson and it must have been a welcome relief to the beleagured

administration if part of this task could be achieved through the virus of communalism.

VII

The general administrative policy regarding observance of religious rites was outlined in the following terms in 1893 : Under British rule the impartiality in reference to all forms of religious creed, " which is the guiding principle of our administration", did not permit one party to impose its will upon another or to prevent the observance of religious rites which, though repugnant to its own feeling, were sanctioned by the sentiments of its opponents. Consequently, there had been a general tendency towards assertion of religious privileges on both sides and this had naturally been the greatest in those localities where during the pre-British administration one party possessed an ascendancy which had now ceased. "One of the most difficult problems of our Government is to reconcile the impartial administration of justice and the equal treatment of all creeds with the necessity of keeping the peace and repressing demonstrations intended or likely to give offence to religious opponents. In such cases ancient custom is the guide, which has for the most part been followed when disputes have arisen."⁶⁸

Thus till the last decade of the nineteenth century the Government, both at Central and provincial level, appeared to have viewed the communal outbursts as purely public order problems which were not grave enough to pose any threat to the security of the state. The internal political scene was not marked by turbulence and there was no major cause for anxiety for the burgeoning colonial economic interests. All these made for an expansive mental frame for the rulers in which public order problems could be viewed in a relatively objective, non-partisan perspective. Hence the requisite political will and confidence, and the consequent administrative clarity of purpose and effectiveness were in evidence in the handling of communal disorders. This was amply demonstrated during the 1897 Tala riot over the mosque issue.

The scenario started changing from the first decade of the twentieth century, both externally and internally. During 1903-04, the Government of India was concerned about the possibility of a 'serious war with Russia', and the question of withdrawal of troops from different parts of India and their replacement by armed reserves were under serious consideration.⁶⁹ Internally, the rising price trend and periodic spells of

depression in jute and cotton textile industries were also creating tension in the industrial-economic field.⁷⁰

On top of everything, however, the swadeshi and anti-partition movement – "undoubtedly the most widespread and intense that ever stirred Bengal"⁷¹ could not be dismissed as a mere law and order or as a simple public order problem. This and the two following chapters would show that the rulers viewed the movement as a palpable threat to the security of the state. It became a serious political issue, to counter which the straightforward public order approach of the earlier era gave place to a murky game of power politics. In this the known communal sentiments of the Maulavis, the latent inferiority complex of the Muslim middle class, the political ambitions of the upper class Muslims (notably the Nawab of Dacca) and the agrarian grievances of the Muslim peasantry were exploited to the fullest extent.⁷² In consequence of this intrusion of political considerations in the handling of the explosive communal issue, the administrative credibility was lost, which was not the case during the pre-partition period. The administration's attitude and conduct during the Mymensingh, Coomilla and Tippera communal outrages of 1906-07 demonstrated in ample measure this changed perception and the consequent operational distortions. If the administration displayed some vigour in connection with the Chitpur Bakr-Id riot of 1910, it may be recalled that it did so only at a later stage when the menacing conduct of the Muslim workers in the industrial belt seemed to threaten the commercial interest of the ruling group.

NOTES

1. Ram Manohar Lohia Vs.State of Bihar, 1 SCR 709(746), 1966.
2. Bipan Chandra, quoted in Asghar Ali Engineer, "Understanding communalism: report on a Seminar", *EPW*, 5 May, 1984, p.755.
3. *ibid.*, quoting Aloo Dastur, pp.752-753; also see Gyan Pandey, "Rallying round the cow: sectarian strife in the Bhojpur region, c. 1888-1917", in Ranajit Guha(ed.), *Subaltern studies III*, pp.63-64.
4. Cited by C.A. Bayly, "The pre-history of communalism : Religious conflict in India, 1700-1860", *Modern Asian studies*, Vol.19, part 2, April 1985. Incidentally, Bayly could cite a number of religious conflicts during the 1700-1860 period, mostly occurring in UP.
5. *Samachar Darpan*, 25 October 1820.
6. *Sambad Bhaskar*, 13 January 1857.
7. The common characteristics have been brought out in a research work by Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871 - 1906: a quest for identity*, pp.106ff.
8. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p.40.

9. SAB, I, p.295; II, p.240; VI, p.388.
10. *ibid.*, VI, 388; Hunter, *The Musalman*, p.7
11. Beveridge, *The district of Bakarganj*, p.255. The above transformation on a superficial plane simply to give a new look to Bengali Muslims has also been mentioned by Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p.223, F.N.63.
12. R.Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p.106.
13. *Kath Mollah* literally means an ignorant but bigoted Muslim priest. "Learned or not, the influence of the mollahs over the rural (Muslim) society was ... absolute ... They ... had the power to rouse the rural masses to action": *ibid.*, pp. 28-31.
14. *ibid.*, p.111.
15. *ibid.*, pp.111-12.
16. *ibid.*, pp.132.
17. Secretary of State letter to GOI, No.100 (Public) dated 7 September 1893, and GOI reply in Home(Pub.) Desp. No.84 of 1893 dated 27 December 1893: GOI Home(Pub.) Progs/December 1893/210-13.
18. *ibid.* This view finds support in an editorial dated 20 June 1857 in *Sambad Pravakar* in which it was stated that during Muslim rule no religious freedom was enjoyed and instances of harassment were plentiful. Thus, it is reported, during Muharram every Hindu was required to wear a thread round his neck, visit the Dargahs and also observe silence (*gami*) as a mark of mourning. This editorial further mentioned that under the British rule such oppressive practices had been dispensed with: Benoy Ghosh(compiled and ed.), *Samayik Patra Banglar Samaj Chitra*, Vol.I, 227. Girish Basu, *op.cit.*, p.241 also refers to the observance of mourning and silence (*gami*) for 40 days in Murshidabad following the death of Nawab Alivardi Khan when no music could be played and all festivities including marriage ceremonies were banned.
19. GOI Home (Pub.) Despatch No.84 of 1893 dated 27 December 1893.
20. *ibid.*
21. For instance, the European Volunteer Corps (Calcutta Light Horse) assembled for intervening in the riots without being formally called out or requisitioned. Moreover, one Capt. Petley of the Naval Volunteers took upon himself the task of hurriedly preparing a plan of evacuation of European families in a small vessel of the Corps and also made 'inspection trips' along the Hooghly river upto Barrackpore, looking up the mills on the way: D.O. letter dated 1 August 1897 from Bolton, C.S./GOB to Hewett, H.S./GOI in GOI Home (Pub.) Progs./Oct.1897/124-57. The Administrator of French Chandernagore also requested the GOB for assistance in the event of disturbances, and the GOI endorsed the Bengal Lt. Governor's "proposal to comply with the request ... for troops in case of necessity" : *ibid.*, Nos.136-38. During the disturbances, both the native infantry regiments at Fort William (Calcutta) were composed of Muhammedans and a British regiment had to be kept inside Fort William 'to keep an eye on them': p.28 of the GOI notes in the above Progs. file.
22. The Gloucestershire Regiment was called out in aid of Calcutta Police on the mid-day of 30 June and it continued in some strength beyond 12 July 1897: Tel. from GOI to Secretary of State dated 12 July 1897 - *ibid.*, Progs. 148.
23. *Sanjivani*, dated 3 July 1897 (RNNB for week ending 10 July 1897).
24. Confdl.D.O. dated 7 July 1897 from Bolton, C.S./GOB to Hewett, H.S./GOI: GOI Home (Pub.) Progs./Oct.1897/124-57.

25. *Mihir-o-Sudhakar* dt. 24 July 1897 (RNNB for the week ending 26 July 1897); RIFA, 1897. Two of the notable studies on Tala riots are by Ranajit Das Gupta, "Material conditions and behavioural aspects of Calcutta working class, 1875-1899", *Occasional paper No. 22*, CSSSC, 1979 and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Communal riots and labour: Bengal's jute mill-hands in the 1890s", *Past and Present*, May 1981, pp.140-169.
26. GOI Home (Pub.) Progs./Oct. 1897/124-57, notes dt. 9 Aug. 1897 by J. Woodburn, Home Member of G.G.'s Council, p.31.
27. Report by M/s. Begg Dunlop & Co., Managing Agents of Alliance Jute Mills: GOB/Judl. (Police)/Sept. 1897/83-84.
28. IJMA letter No. 174-D dated 14 July 1897 to Chief Secretary, GOB: GOI Home (Police) Progs./June 1898/134.
29. The members of the Committee were (1) C.S./GOB, (2) IGP, (3) C.P., Calcutta, (4) Nairn (representing Jute) and (5) Cheetham (representing Cotton).
30. GOI Home (Police) Progs./June 1898/135-141.
31. GOI Home (Police) Progs./June 1898/133: GOB No. 1918 J dt. 31 March 1898 to GOI.
32. *ibid.*, notes dt. 16 April 1898 by H. Luson (Dy. Secy., Home/GOI).
33. GOI Home (Police) Progs. A/Feb. 1911/62-64.
34. Such a view has been taken by Ranajit Das Gupta, "Material conditions and behavioural aspects of Calcutta working class, 1857-1899".
35. Report of Clarke, DM, Mymensingh, dt. 5 May 1907 : GOI Home (Poll.) Progs. A/Dec. 1907/58. The narration of subsequent events is based on the above report.
36. GOI Home (Poll.) A/Dec. 1907/58: Report of R. Nathan, Dacca Divisional Commissioner, no. 6k, dt. July 1907. Also see, a telegram to Govt. published in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* dt. 30 April 1907; report of W.R. Gourlay, Officer-on-special duty, dt. 30 Oct. 1907 in GOI Rev. & Agri. (Land Rev.) Progs. A/March 1908/42-43.
37. Nathan report, *op.cit.*, para 15.
38. This was somewhat akin to the subsequent 'contract labour' system which operates even now in various industrial units and construction sites. There was, however, a vital distinction between these two systems. The latter-day contract labour groups were heterogeneous in composition consisting of mixed religious groups and the contractor also did not necessarily induct labour from his native province. In the sardari system, the sardar brought people from his own native province and usually of the same religious affiliation as his own.
39. Even now such *mohallas* in many areas are known by the religious or regional composition of their inhabitants.
40. Many of these migrants were, and still are, in the habit of leaving behind their family members in their native villages.
41. Much assistance has been taken from two studies in analysing the rationale behind the involvement of migrant labourers in communal disturbances in Bengal during the pre-partition period: Ranajit Das Gupta, "Material conditions and behavioural aspects of Calcutta working class, 1857-1899"; and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal Jute Mill Hands in the 1890s", *Past and Present*, May 1981.
42. This failure of the Bengali bhadralok leadership has been aptly analysed by Sumit Sarkar. *Swadeshi movement in Bengal*, pp. 109 ff, 411 ff.

43. These two incidents are the Nikaripara mosque issue in Shambazar (Calcutta) of 1891 and the Tala (Calcutta) case of 1897.
44. GOI Home(Police) Progs.B/May 1911/38-39. The whole matter was, however, played down by the Government after a perfunctory enquiry by the Commandant of the Battalion involved.
45. GOI Notes, dt.10.1.1911 by H.G.Stokes in p.2 of the file: GOI Home(Police) Progs.A/Feb. 1911/62-64.
46. GOI Home(Police) Progs.B/May 1911/38-39.
47. On the basis of reports from Bengal Government and its officers, these causes were outlined in a D.O.letter No.145 Pub. dated 12 July 1906 from H.H.Risley (H.S./GOI) to Sir Arthur Godley, Under Secretary of State for India: GOI Home (Pub.) Progs.A/July 1906/24.
48. EB and Assam Govt.letter No.374C, dated 17 August 1907 to GOI: GOI Home (Political) Progs.A/December 1907/58. Report of R.Nathan (Offg. Commissioner, Dacca Division), No.6K, July (date not indicated) 1907 to EB and A Government formed an enclosure to the latter's report to GOI dated 17 August 1907.
49. *ibid.*, para.5.
50. Nathan's report, *op.cit.*, para 16(2), (5).
51. GOI Home (Public) Progs.A/July 1906/124.
52. GOI Home (Public) A/May 1907/169.
53. GOI Home (Poll.) Progs.A/July 1907/14-15.
54. GOI Home(Poll.) Progs.A/December 1907/57-63, pp.99-100. Nathan's report, para 15(4) also admits that "posting of notices inciting Mohammedans to rise against Hindus fanned the flame" of communal violence. The report is silent as to what legal or administrative action was taken against these.
55. Report of W.R.Gourlay, officer-on-special duty, dt.30 October 1907 to Mymensingh Collector: GOI Revenue and Agriculture (Land Revenue) Progs.A/March 1908/42-43.
56. Note by H.Adamson dt. 26 June 1907: GOI Home(Poll.) Progs.A/July 1907/189.
57. Sumit Sarkar "The condition and nature of subaltern militancy" in *Subaltern studies III*, pp.276-281. A more balanced picture was, however, given in his *Swadeshi movement*, Ch.8.
58. GOI Home(Political) Progs.A/December 1907/57-63, pp.99,106-109
59. See, e.g., Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi movement*, p.459.
60. *ibid.*, p.459.
61. This is borne out also by the history of rioting in eastern Bengal in later years. A detailed study of Kishoreganj riots of 1930 revealed that "rioting, once it began, gathered its own momentum and the rioters were not always discriminating in their purpose", see Sugata Bose, "The roots of communal violence in rural Bengal: a study of the Kishoreganj riots, 1930", *Modern Asian Studies*, 16,3(1982), pp.463-91; also the same author's *Agrarian Bengal*, Cambridge, 1986, p.192.
62. Sumit Sarkar, for instance, has sought to justify the desecration of Hindu deities (allegedly constructed through Iswar Britti) which took place on a large scale during the communal outrages of April-May 1907 in Mymensingh and Tippera districts. In doing so, Sarkar literally echoed the plea of Dacca Commissioner (R.Nathan): Sarkar,

136- *Crime and public disorder in colonial Bengal*

Swadeshi Movement, p.459 and "The condition of subaltern militancy", *Subaltern studies III*, p.281.

63. GOI Home (Poll.) Progs.A/Dec.1907/57-63, p.108.
64. GOI Home (Poll.)A/Dec.1907/58, paras 2 and 3 of report from D.M.,Mymensingh dated 5 May 1907.
65. Risley (Home Secretary,GOI) to Gourlay(Under Secretary of State for India) dt. 12 July 1906: Govt.of India Home (Pub.)A/July 1906/24.
66. One may recall here Rabindranath Tagore's denunciation of such practices, e.g.as depicted in his novel *Ghare Baire* and in his essay 'Sadupay'.
67. EB and A Govt.letter dt 17 August 1907, GOI Home (Poll.)A/ Dec. 1907/58 (emphasis added).
68. GOI Home (Pub.) Desp. No.84 of 27 December 1893, paras 2-8.
69. Note dated 21 September 1904 by H.A.Stuart, Director of Central Criminal Intelligence: GOI Home (Police)Progs.A/ December 1904/130-141; GOI Home (Police) Secret Despatch No.47 of 1904 to Secretary of State dated 31 March 1904.
70. *BAAR*, 1899-1900, p.7, para 22; Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi movement in Bengal*, p.189.
71. IGP, Bengal's "Report on the agitation against the partition of Bengal" as enclosure to GOB letter No.205-P dt 27 January 1906 : GOI Home (Pub.) Progs.A/June 1906/175.
72. All these factors have been adequately substantiated by Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi movement*, Ch.8, and R.Ahmed,op.cit.

7 Industrial Workers'

Unrest

The years between 1850 and 1875 were significant in the history of industrial development of India. It was during this period that the first successful jute and cotton mills were established, the coalfields were connected by rail to the port city of Calcutta and the rapid expansion of railways throughout India began. The pace of industrialisation was especially rapid in the two Presidencies of Bengal and Bombay, perhaps more so in the former. By the end of the 1880s, the city of Calcutta and some of its suburban areas in Hooghly, Howrah and 24-Parganas had assumed the characteristics of industrial towns. By the year 1888, this industrial cluster of Bengal had 76 mills and factories employing more than 100 persons each.

This emerging phenomenon could not but bring in its train a set of socio-economic problems and thereby add new complexities to public order issues and problems. In this chapter, therefore, we will address ourselves to the following tasks: (a) to locate the endemic foci of unrest among the industrial workers; (b) to assess the factors which may have generated such pressure points; (c) to analyse the forms and manifestations of unrest among industrial workers and administrative reactions thereto; and (d) to present a comparative study of the behaviour patterns of industrial labour in two of the principal industrial sectors of Bengal (i.e. textiles and coal-mining).

Though the process of industrialisation had begun in Bengal during the fifties of the nineteenth century, recorded accounts of unrest among industrial workers are negligible till about the mid-nineties. One would

have normally expected a fair crop of outbursts during the early phase when hordes of labourers were being inducted at the collieries, jute and cotton mill areas and also around road and railway construction sites. One of the possible reasons for their absence could be the relatively transitory nature of the workforce due to the frequent shifting of work-sites at the early stage of construction and factory-building activities. As the construction phase ended and the production and manufacture stage was reached, a relatively less mobile and in-situ workforce came up. But even then a certain degree of migratory character of the labourers continued for the succeeding decades. Since the demand for labour was high, they could leave distasteful or unfavourable work-sites and move to another place : "Frequently no definite demands are formulated, no grievances are stated, no indication is given as to the cause of the discontent; the operatives simply leave work in a body, or more commonly, they drop off one by one without explanation, and accept employment under more congenial conditions in other factories."¹ Lack of leadership and organisation, inchoate state of realisation regarding the efficacy of combined action and similar other factors were also undoubtedly responsible for the absence of any manifestation of concerted protest action by the workers during the first three or four decades of industrialisation in Bengal.

From this, however, it should not be presumed that labour unrest including strike was unknown in Bengal prior to the 1890s. Thus a report submitted by the Joint Magistrate of 24-Parganas district (F.H.B. Skrine), who was also a Factory Inspector under the Factories Act 1881, stated in 1883 that "strikes are by no means unknown".² Again, the District Magistrate of 24-Parganas reported in 1886 about 'strikes' in some cotton mills of his district "against a reduction of 12 1/2 percent in wages which was necessitated by the depressed state of trade."³ Nevertheless, such occurrences were sporadic and isolated and as such did not cause any concern either for the employers or for the governmental authorities till about the early nineties.

In order to identify the endemic pockets, an attempt has been made to collate the available recorded data about the principal incidents of industrial unrest in Bengal between 1862 and 1912 (see Appendix VII). It appears that—

- (a) at least three such incidents took place during 1862-89, twentyone during 1890-99, three during 1900-1904 and thirty during 1905-12.

This aspect of the preponderance of unrest since the nineties of the

19th century will be analysed in the following section. Out of a total of fiftyseven reported incidents (see Appendix VII), as many as 40 took place in jute mills, 3 in cotton mills, 6 in railway stations or workshops and the remaining 8 affected other establishments – Government as well as private, like printing presses, Calcutta Corporation and Tramways, postal department etc. The jute mills having been affected most in terms of the number of incidents and also perhaps on the score of involvement of the number of workers, do have a special significance. As we will see later, jute mills in Bengal during our period had the largest complement of labourers among the three main industrial sectors – jute, cotton and coal. Besides this, there were certain other factors – demographic, institutional-organisational – which created considerable tension within this workforce.

- (b). Only about seven of the incidents took place in distant areas like Burdwan, Asansol, Kharagpur; all the rest (i.e. about 50) occurred in Calcutta and its neighbouring areas of 24-Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly. In other words, the endemic zone of industrial unrest lay within a radius of about 30-40 miles from Calcutta, on both sides of the Hooghly river. On the eastern bank, the affected area stretched from Budge Budge on the south to Naihati-Bhatpara on the north; on the western river bank, such pockets extended from Bowraah-Sankrail at the southern extremity to Serampore (Hooghly district) on the north (see sketch map).

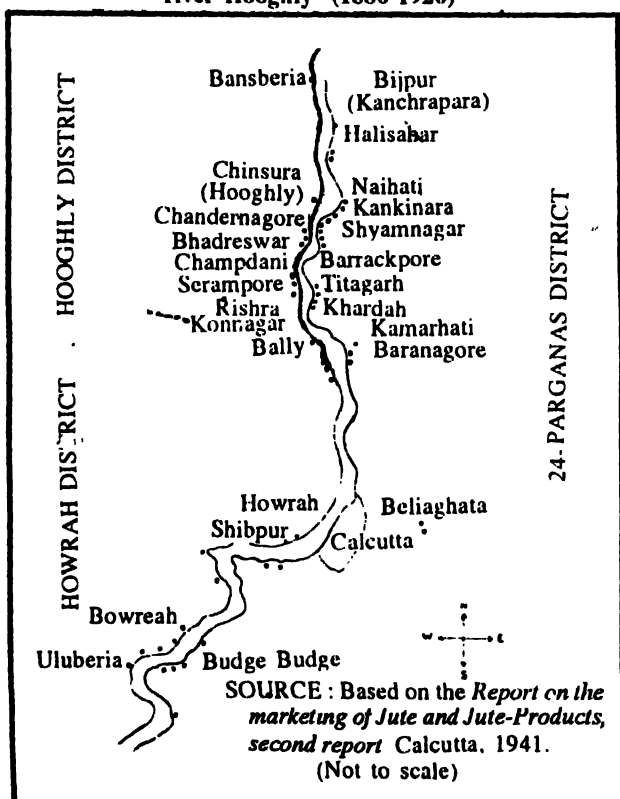
II

Every form of violence can be reasonably expected to pass through two phases before it erupts into overt acts. The first, i.e. the build-up phase, develops over a period of time, while the second or the proximate phase is marked by the appearance of identifiable cause or causes for accentuated tension. Eventually the tension leads to overt acts affecting public order. The build-up phase is generally of a complex nature in which the interplay of several factors takes place. This is more so in a situation of social violence as we will presently outline.

It is necessary to take note of the important parameters of the late 19th century and early 20th century turbulence amongst the industrial workforce in Bengal. Some of these, having economic or socio-cultural

dimensions have already been discussed in the previous chapter : the lure of higher earnings that acted as a pull factor in drawing into Bengal large inflows of migrant population, the ideological and religious ties (sometimes extra-territorial) of certain migrant groups which indirectly fostered sectarian attitudes and activities and the continuing lack of cohesion and integration in the industrial workforce as between co-migrants and also between migrants and residents. We shall therefore concentrate here on two additional factors that played a significant role in the context of industrial workers' unrest, i.e., demographic imbalances and institutional distortions.

Sketch map showing the location of major jute mills in Bengal along the banks of the river Hooghly (1880-1920)



Demographic Imbalances : As we see in Table 7.1 below, the process of urbanisation in Bengal maintained a steady pace between 1891 and 1911. A remarkable feature of this process was the impressive growth rate of industrial towns which, in turn, acquired a peculiar characteristic of their own— the overwhelming presence of migrants from neighbouring provinces who were employed in very large number in the local industrial establishments. These three interlinked demographic trends – urbanisation, growth of industrial towns and the concomitant growth of migrant labour can be seen in Tables 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 below:

TABLE 7.1
Growth of urban population in Bengal (1872-1911)

| Year | % increase | urban population as % of total population |
|------|------------|---|
| 1872 | — | 5.35 |
| 1881 | 7.2 | 5.38 |
| 1891 | 11.6 | 5.38 |
| 1901 | 16.1 | 6.06 |
| 1911 | 14.2 | 6.52 |

Source : COI, 1921, Vol.V (Bengal), Part 1 (Report), page 104.

TABLE 7.2
Growth rate (%) of average industrial town in Bengal vis-a-vis average country town in Bengal (1872-1911)

| | 1872-81 | 1881-91 | 1891-1901 | 1901-1911 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| Average country town | 5.3 | 1.8 | 0.7 | 4.2 |
| Average industrial town | 8.1 | 16.1 | 10.9 | 30.1 |

Source : As for Table 7.1, page 110.

As Table 7.3 shows, towards the close of the 19th century the proportion of the Hindi-speaking (upcountry) population in the industrial workforce found in the three districts of 24-Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly varied between 49% and 65% though their incidence in the total population stood at 6.7%, 10% and 4% respectively. Thus, by the first decade of the 20th century, the ethnic composition of the population in parts of Bengal had changed so much that some mill towns appeared to be "practically foreign towns in the midst of Bengal"⁴.

TABLE 7.3
Strength and composition of the industrial workforce in 3 industrial districts of Bengal (1897)

| District | Total strength (a) | No. of Hindus (b) | No. of Muslims (c) | No. of up-countrymen (d) | No. of local residents (e) |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. 24-Parganas | 46400 | 27440 | 18960 | 29240 | 17160 |
| % of (a) | | 59 | 41 | 63 | 37 |
| 2. Howrah | 38640 | 24105 | 14322 | 18820 | 19820 |
| % of (a) | | 62 | 37 | 48.7 | 51.3 |
| 3. Hooghly | 19636 | 13544 | 6092 | 12733 | 6903 |
| % of (a) | | 69 | 31 | 65 | 35 |
| 4. Total of 3 districts | 104676 | 65089 | 39374 | 60793 | 43883 |
| % of (a) | | 62 | 38 | 58 | 42 |

Source : Computed on the basis of data furnished by the Inspector General of Police, Bengal, vide GOI Home (Pub.) Progs/Oct. 1897/139-141.

A micro-level study of some industrial pockets in the district of 24-Parganas will bring out such demographic imbalance in bolder relief. These mill towns along the banks of the Hooghly river showed an extraordinary growth of population which was accounted for by the large influx of migrant upcountry labourers:

TABLE 7.4
Growth rate of industrial workers in some mill towns of 24-Parganas district (1901 - 1911)

| Towns | Increase of population (1901-1911) | | Increase of mill workers (1901-1911) | |
|---|------------------------------------|------|--------------------------------------|------|
| | Actual | % | Actual | % |
| Bhatpara Naihati Halisahar } } | 36763 | 81% | 30835 | 215% |
| Titagarh | 29106 | 181% | 21649 | 162% |

Source : COI, 1911, Vol.V (Bengal), para.1, page 79.

The major concentration of organised industries and manufactures in Calcutta and its adjacent districts of Howrah, Hooghly and 24-Parganas resulted in the growth of innumerable industrial slums in these areas, with a very high density of population. This, in its train, showed up another demographic distortion in the shape of an abnormally low female - male ratio :

TABLE 7.5
Sex ratio (no. of females per thousand males) in Bengal
1872-1911 (Census Years)

| | 1872 | 1881 | 1891 | 1901 | 1911 |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Average country town | 947 | 971 | 903 | 869 | 841 |
| Average industrial town | 798 | 767 | 685 | 605 | 582 |
| Calcutta City | 552 | 558 | 526 | 507 | 475 |
| Bengal | 992 | 994 | 973 | 960 | 945 |

Source : COI, 1921, Vol.V, part 1, page 111.

Such disparity was even more marked in the major industrial pockets: sex ratio was as low as 434 in Champdani, 438 in Titagarh and Budge Budge, 520 in Howrah and Bally, 521 in Bhadreswar (Hooghly) and 547 in Risbra-Konnagar (Hooghly)

The aforesaid demographic imbalances inevitably bred some divisive socio-cultural propensities mainly in the shape of communal tensions as noted in the previous chapter. Predictably, therefore, a sizeable number of disturbances involving industrial workers had religious/community-centric ramifications as we shall see in sec.IV of this chapter.

Institutional-Organisational causes : We have already pointed out two of the institutional factors responsible for generating friction: the *mohalla* system of dwellings and the *sardari* system of recruitment. The *sardari* system led to a two-tier exploitation of the workers: the *sardar* invariably extracted a *salami*⁵ from every worker inducted by him; the employer also could cheat the labourers with low wages by keeping the *sardar* in good humour with payment of a commission or otherwise. Jobbery, nepotism and not unoften the tyrannical iron grip of the *sardar* exceeded the limits of the workers' forbearance and resulted in revolt – as it happened in the Shibpur and Budge Budge Jute Mills disturbances of 1893 and 1895 respectively (see sls. 5 and 19 of Appendix VII).⁶

Religion and regionwise grouping of dwelling settlements (e.g. Muslim mohalla/dhowra/bustee and Bihari or U.P. mohalla/dhowra/bustee, Oriya lines etc.) in close proximity was another institutional arrangement which continued to serve as a fertile ground for bickerings on petty issues; this helped to foster violence on a larger scale over issues like cow-slaughter during the Bakr-Id festivals. Much to the advantage of the exploitative employers, this situation proved to be one of the causes for keeping the labour force fragmented almost till the end of our period.

The third institutional factor responsible for quite a few outbursts was the almost universal practice of the employers to keep the supervisory-managerial levels as the exclusive preserve of the Europeans and Eurasians and only marginally of the Anglo-Indians. Indians were almost totally excluded from these levels.⁷ It is no wonder, therefore, that such deliberate policy of alienation between the workers and their supervisors kept the latter in the dark about the causes of simmering discontent amongst the former till it burst out in the open. Besides being largely ignorant of the languages, customs and habits of their work-force, many of these managers and supervisors displayed not only a lamentable lack of sensitivity but resorted to high-handed and insulting behaviour. Their proneness to resort to physical force including even use of firearms against the workers on minor provocations further exacerbated the situation and provided the flashpoint for many an industrial unrest. Instances of such managerial failures and aggressiveness were witnessed in the Budge Budge Jute Mills riot (1895), Titagarh Jute Mills riot (1895), Kamarhati Jute Mills riot (1895) and the Clive Jute Mills strike (1906). These offensive acts of European managers reached such proportions in 1895 that the provincial administration was constrained to take a serious note of it. The Lt. Governor of Bengal strongly deprecated the practice of employing firearms to put down demonstrations on the part of the employers of the mills and he believed that "the occasions on which recourse to such weapons is really necessary are of the rarest possible occurrence, and that there are few crowds of native workers who would not yield to firm and reasonably conciliatory action on the part of European managers and assistants."⁸

III

It appears from the above analysis of the demographic, socio-economic and institutional factors that all these resulted in an industrial workforce in Bengal which was largely migrant in character and unstable, volatile and tension-ridden. Additionally, the labourers were usually fragmented amongst themselves as clusters of Hindus and Muslims, as local residents and up-countrymen. Hence even minor sparks could set in motion a chain-reaction culminating in violent outbursts, at times unrelated to industrial relationship as happened in the wake of the Tala (1897) and

Chitpur (1910) riots of Calcutta. Quite often such outbursts arose out of religious issues. We will take note of some such cases which had fairly widespread ramifications.

Religion-based agitations: On a rough estimate, 18 instances of this category took place during our period (see following table). Interestingly enough, 14 of these occurred during 1895 itself and no plausible explanation could be assigned for such recurrences in a single year. Largely due to the insensitivity of the European managers, requests from the workers to allow them leave of absence (paid holiday) for attending to the religious rites of many of their important festivals caused considerable resentment. In some instances the managers could avoid a show-down by granting them leave for a few hours or for a day or two. But more often than not the managers wrongly interpreted such demands as defiance of authority or as a deliberate move to retrain from work. Thus demonstrations, skirmishes and strikes were the outcome, at least on these occasions of which some recorded evidence is available.

TABLE 7.6
Major incidents of religion-based labour unrest in Bengal: 1890-1912

| | | | |
|--------|--|--------|--|
| 1. | Baranagar Jute Mill | (1894) | Bakr-Id |
| 2. | Kamarhati Jute Mill | (1894) | Bakr-Id |
| 3-5. | Kankinara Jute Mill | (1894) | Bakr-Id, Muharram, Rathjatra (on three separate occasions). |
| 6-8. | Gouripur Jute Mill | (1895) | -do- |
| 9-11. | Dunbar Cotton Mill | (1895) | -do- |
| 12-14. | Titagarh Jute Mill | (1895) | Idul-Fitr, Annapurna puja, Bakr-Id (on three separate occasions). |
| 15. | Ganges Jute Mill | (1895) | Bakr-Id |
| 16. | Kamarhati Jute Mill | (1895) | Muharram |
| 17. | Mills/factories in and around Calcutta | (1897) | Unrest arising out of Govt. action against rioters over the issue of the improvised mosque at Tala (Calcutta). |
| 18. | -do- | (1910) | -do- regarding the Bakr-Id riot in Calcutta |

Source : Appendix VII.

The sequence of events in one of the cases of the above description illustrates the behaviour patterns of both: labour and management. By and large the other incidents also followed a similar pattern.

Titagarh Jute Mills disturbance, 1895: In April 1895 the Muslim workers demanded a full day's paid holiday for celebrating Idul-Fitr as

against only three hours' leave in previous years. This being refused, they absented themselves for the whole day and resorted to picketing. The mill authority not only deducted the pay for that day but also imposed a fine. The workers protested against this and staged a 'threatening demonstration against the manager'; the latter called in the police and placed a charge of rioting against the ringleaders. When a police party (1 sub-inspector and 20 constables) came and tried to arrest the charged persons, they were resisted by the workers, beaten and forced to retreat. The latter attacked the mills when the mill manager and his European assistants fired upon the riotous workers, five of whom were wounded.⁹

This and a few incidents in other mills alarmed the mill-owners and prompted the Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA) to submit two memoranda to the Government of Bengal in April and September 1895. The IJMA drew the Government's attention to insufficient police coverage in the industrial belt and demanded not only augmentation of the police but also posting of European supervisory police officers (preferably European Assistant Superintendents of Police) at Barrackpore and Serampore. They emphasized the need for police supervision in the riverine municipalities stretching from Cossipore to Naihati, a distance of 25 miles, having no less than 10 large industrial concerns (jute, cotton, paper, glass), giving employment in all to about 35,000 workpeople, many of whom were upcountrymen "not as amenable to discipline as natives of Bengal".¹⁰ What followed may be termed as the model of administrative thoroughness and promptitude. A detailed mill-to-mill enquiry was organised through the Deputy Inspector-General of Police (Pratt). His exhaustive report to the Inspector-General of Police dated 13 July 1895 confirmed the apprehension of the mill managers that police protection was insufficient and that "in a case of emergency police cannot be got except after great delay."¹¹

Soon after the Titagarh incident, an equally violent outbreak took place in Budge Budge Jute Mills in June 1895, demanding dismissal of an unpopular sardar. In this case also the European managerial staff fired on the rioting labourers. The IJMA wrote to the Inspector-General of Police about the urgent need for police cover for the mills and factories on both sides of the river from Budge Budge to Hooghly, employing some 70,000 workers and having mill properties worth lakhs of rupees. On the basis of the Pratt enquiry and the representations from the IJMA, the Inspector-General proposed the setting up of police outposts at

Bhatpara, Shamnagar and Titagarh, strengthening of Budge Budge P.S. and posting of an European Inspector at Barrackpore having jurisdiction over the area between Cossipore (North Calcutta) and Kanchrapara (24-Parganas). The IGP pointed out that in addition to these, the District Police Reserve of 24-Parganas at Alipore, the 50 armed police reserve at Chinsura (Hooghly) and another 20 at Howrah could also be utilised to meet emergent situations in the industrial belt. The Government of Bengal promptly sanctioned this proposal.

We have seen in the previous chapter that the Tala riots of 1897 and the Chitpur Bakr-Id riots of 1910 had the distinct imprint of migrant labour involvement and the proximate causes in both cases were connected with religious beliefs and practices. On all these three occasions – Titagarh, Tala and Chitpur – unrest originating from religion-based grievances quickly developed into specific forms of labour protest like demonstration, cease-work, rioting or strike. This widespread repercussion in the industrial belt predictably caused concern, if not alarm, amongst the European employers and the Government. Additionally, the inadequacy as well as the ineffectiveness of the civil police to cope with the large-scale mob violence were brought to the surface. The corrective measures of the Government were confined almost solely to the creation of extra police units. More specifically, it amounted to greater reliance on paramilitary armed police. The Government seldom sought to analyse the root causes, the socio-economic ones in particular, for evolving remedial measures. This was done only peripherally in the wake of the Titagarh and Budge Budge Jute Mills disturbances of 1895 and this was confined to an appeal to the owners to provide better housing accommodation for the workers.¹²

Unrest from economic and other secular issues : The closing years of the nineteenth century in Bengal as also the first decade of the twentieth century witnessed a number of labour unrests arising out of economic distress. We have already noted that these years were undoubtedly marked by a considerable rise in the prices of common rice in southern and western Bengal – one rupee could buy 16.4 seers of rice in 1890-91 and it dropped to 12.1 seers per rupee in 1896. Wholesale price indices too continued to go up every year – from 107 in 1903 to 149 in 1908. Even more specifically for the jute and cotton textile mill areas this rise was unmistakable in respect of both rice and wheat, the staple food of a Bengali and upcountry worker respectively (see Table below).

TABLE 7.7
Quinquennial average index numbers of prices of
common rice and wheat

| | 1881-1885 | | 1886-1890 | | 1891-1895 | | 1896-1900 | |
|-------------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|
| | Rice | Wheat | Rice | Wheat | Rice | Wheat | Rice | Wheat |
| Calcutta | 110 | 96 | 102 | 102 | 137 | 115 | 149 | 135 |
| 24-Parganas | 97 | 103 | 101 | 102 | 122 | 118 | 139 | N.A. |
| Howrah | 102 | 94 | 114 | 105 | 145 | 113 | 155 | 133 |

Note : 1871-75 = 100 (incidentally, 1872-73 were years of considerable scarcity in Bengal)

Source : *Prices and Wages in India*, 21st issue, Table No.23, pp.129,134.

The workers were doubly hit – by a fall both in real wages (due to the upward price trend) and in money wages (due to cut in the number of working days per week/month).¹³ In defence of the latter measure, the management proffered the plea of ‘depressed condition of trade’ and also quite often resorted to reduction in wage rates. In the face of the foregoing specific evidence, it is difficult to accept the claims in some official reports that the workers did not suffer economically in terms of wages. Even conceding that the depressed state of export markets during 1886- 90 and the stiff competition from the Dundee jute industry had some adverse impact on the jute industry in Bengal, the management’s argument was somewhat contrived. How else can one explain the fact that during this very period they kept on increasing both the number of looms and the labour force (see Table below)?

TABLE 7.8
% increase in looms and labour force in Bengal jute Industry
(1885 - 1901)

| | Looms | Labour force |
|----------------------|-------|--------------|
| 1885-86 to 1890-91 | 16.8 | 28.2 |
| 1890-91 to 1895-96 | 30.3 | 31.9 |
| 1895-96 to 1900-1901 | 50.9 | 47.8 |

Source : *Financial and commercial statistics of British India*, GOI Statistical Department.

The year 1895 itself witnessed quite a few instances of workers’ unrest, some of which were related to cut in wages while the major issue in the others was the workers’ demand for increased wages in view of the rising prices. In the Kankinara Jute Mills (24-Parganas),

for instance, the management had reduced the pay of the spinners from 3 1/2 rupees to 3 1/4 rupees. The establishment of new mills in neighbouring areas, indicative of prosperity in this industry, led the spinners to demand higher wages. The manager tried to lock out the ring leaders and this caused some excitement among the workers; however, no violence was committed but the police arrested the ring leaders, obviously at the instance of the management and they were bound down to keep the peace. It appeared that the custom of keeping a week's pay always in hand was one cause of the disturbance. The workers resented the practice as it prevented their leaving a mill to better their prospects except at the sacrifice of a week's wages. This was pointed out to the mill managers by the Divisional Commissioner but to no avail.¹⁴ During July 1895 there was a demand for higher wages among the spinners of another jute factory in Garden Reach but a strike was averted by granting some concessions to the workers.

The Baranagore Jute Mills case of 1896 illustrates the desperation of the workers in the face of the employer's apathy to their requests for wage revision since 1894-95. Finally on 30 March 1896 the spinners in one of the factories of this mill surrounded the manager and the spinning master, and refused to work unless they were allowed increased wages; on the next day, the workers of another factory of this mill went on strike. They were in a violent mood and assaulted an Indian clerk and also showered brickbats into the mill premises. On being called in, the police arrested several workers and sent them up for trial on charges of unlawful assembly and rioting. On 4 April all the striking workers assembled at the factory gates to demand their wages but were again dispersed by police.¹⁵

Perhaps the most significant incident of group action by workers during the nineteenth century took place in the Bowraah Cotton Mills (Howrah) in November 1899. In July that year the wages of all the workers were reduced by 10 to 12 1/2 percent on the plea of 'depressed condition of trade'. The reelers numbering about 400 suffered most as a consequence of such reduction and by about October their earnings were 30% less than those during the corresponding period of the previous year. This was greatly resented by them and they demanded restoration of their wages to the old level. As a protest against the management's reluctance to do so, they resorted to a go-slow movement, a novel form of action during those days. This resulted in a 30 per cent reduction in output which put the company to a loss of about Rs.2,000/- to Rs.3,000/- per month.

The reelers also led several deputations but nothing came out of these negotiations. On 13 November the manager informed the reelers that their wages for October would not be paid till they made up the arrears in reeling. This led to a cease-work by the reelers from 19 November. The mill manager retaliated by declaring a virtual lock-out when he ordered the mill engineer "to draw out fires and stop the mills."¹⁶ Thereafter events took a different turn. At about noon of 19 November the manager visited the mill office where he was joined by four European assistants; they were surrounded by an agitated crowd of 200 to 300 workers. There was an exchange of blows between the managerial staff and some of the agitating workers, followed by brickbatting from other workers. A gun was then sent for by the manager and shots were fired causing injuries to several workers. Ultimately the strike fizzled out and within a few days the normal working of the mill was restored. The management lodged a complaint with the police; some workers were arrested and sent up for trial. Of the 16 persons charged, 3 were sentenced to 6 months' rigorous imprisonment and 13 to 3 months' r.i. A counter-case was also lodged by the workers against the manager and other European managerial staff but nothing came out of it.¹⁷

IV

At this stage we may review the different forms of protest action of the workers and also the issues on which such actions took place. The Bowreah Cotton Mills disturbances of 1899 are illustrative of the graduated scale of a whole spectrum of protest actions undertaken by the workers – starting with verbal protest against wage reduction, followed by a go-slow and then a series of deputations and negotiations, all of which proved infructuous. Then only the workers resorted to the extreme step of cease-work (strike), and that too only after the management had refused to pay their wages for the previous month. When the management reacted by closing down the mill, the manager and his European assistants were surrounded and then followed the fracas. The workers used as weapons bamboos, brickbats and parts of broken machinery. The European managers used their firearms, injuring several riotous workers.

The protest actions of the industrial workforce in Bengal may be classified into five broad categories on the basis of an ascending order of militancy as may be seen from the following Table:

TABLE 7.9
Protest actions by industrial workers in Bengal: 1861-1912

| Sl. No. | Form of protest | No. of mills affected | Year of occurrence |
|---------|--|-----------------------|---|
| 1. | Go-slow/tool-down/short-duration cease-work(not amounting to strike) | 15 | 1897(6); 1899(1); 1899(1); 1905(1); 1910(6). |
| 2. | (a) Demonstration | 34 | 1893(1); 1894(3); 1895(16); 1896(1); 1897(6); 1905(1); 1910(6). |
| | (b) Picketing | 1 | 1895(1) |
| 3. | Gherao(i.e. confining a manager at a particular worksite or in office) | 3 | 1895(1); 1896(1); 1899(1). |
| 4. | Strike: | | |
| | (a) against reduction of wages | 4 | 1881(1); 1890(1); 1895(1); 1899(1). |
| | (b) demanding higher wages | 9 | 1895(1); 1896(1); 1905(1); 1906(5); 1907(1). |
| | (c) demanding better working conditions (e.g., against night shift, lengthening of working hours etc.) | 18 | 1896(1); 1905(5); 1906(2); 1907(1); 1912(9). |
| | (d) demanding better living conditions | 1 | 1906(1). |
| | (e) demanding removal of a sardar | 2 | 1893(1); 1895(1). |
| | (f) against racial discrimination | 2 | 1906(1); 1907(1). |
| | (g) against managerial misconduct (e.g., assault on workers, not allowing 'rakhibandhan' or chanting of 'Bande Mataram') | 5 | 1894(1); 1905(3); 1906(1). |
| | (h) against retrenchment of workers | 9 | 1912(9). |
| | (i) issues not known | 5 | 1862(1); 1900(3); 1906(1). |
| 5. | Rioting: | | |
| | (a) attack on factory premises | 4 | 1895(1); 1896(1); 1897(1); 1899(1). |
| | (b) machine-wrecking | 2 | 1897(1); 1899(1). |
| | (c) attack on managers | 6 | 1894(1); 1895(2); 1896(1); 1897(1); 1899(1). |

Source : Appendix VIII.

The above table brings out the main features of the protest actions of the industrial workers between 1861 and 1912. The first thing that

attracts attention is the multi-faceted modes of registering protest – mechanisms that are even now utilised by the workers in an advanced stage of working class movement for redressal of their grievances. Secondly, most of these protests were spontaneous reactions of the labouring class, there being no organised trade union activity except to a limited extent during the swadeshi period (i.e. from 1905 - 1912).

Barring the religion-based protests referred to earlier, workers do not appear to have been sharply fragmented by regional, caste or religious considerations. At least there is not enough evidence to the contrary. There were a few instances, however, where only one specific group of workers resorted to action while other workers of the same mill did not participate in such action or did so at a belated stage (e.g. during the strike by the spinners in Kankinara, Budge Budge and Baranagar Jute Mills in 1895-96). The workers remained fragmented in another sense and to that extent the impact of their action remained weak. Thus when workers in one mill took to the path of strike or other modes of action demanding higher wages or in protest against reduction of wages, workers of other mills though equally adversely affected, did not make a common cause and embark on simultaneous actions. This was true of both the last decade of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century though these two decades were marked by spiralling prices in Bengal affecting the entire body of workers.¹⁸

Staging demonstrations and striking work were by far the most commonly used forms of protest of the labourers even during the early phase of the formation of the working class in Bengal. Though jute and cotton textile workers figure prominently in this, in most other organised sectors also strike as the "weapon of last resort" in the workers' armoury was in evidence, including the railways, printing presses, iron and steel works, Calcutta Tramways etc.

The workers, by and large, do not appear to have been driven by sheer anger leading to large-scale wrecking of machines or setting fire to factory premises. As Table 7.9 shows, the only two notable incidents of machine-wrecking took place in Alliance Jute Mill, Jagatdal (24-Parganas) in July 1897 demanding leave with pay on 1d day and in Bowreah Cotton Mill in November 1899 when the agitated workers also attacked the factory premises and mishandled the European managers. The other two instances of attack on factory premises took place in Titagarh and Baranagar Jute Mills in 1895 and 1896 respectively. On the other hand, there were more instances in which the targets of the workers' attack were personalised and their wrath was directed against unresponsive and high-handed European managers. This behaviour

pattern suggests that the workers were not generally driven by any blind mob fury but were exercising their judgement in choosing the modes and the targets of protest action. Another notable feature in this context is that all such incidents of organised physical attack on managers appear to have occurred during 1894-1899 and none occurred during the subsequent decade. Perhaps a tentative explanation could be that the workers were gradually perfecting the more sophisticated weapon of group action, namely, strike and realised its potency and efficacy in due course. It may not be entirely coincidental, therefore, that the strike weapon was resorted to in a large number of units during 1905-12 with varying degrees of success, specially in the railways, apart from the jute mills.

V

We have observed in the preceding section the behaviour patterns of the textile workers in the industrial belt of Calcutta and its environs - their protest actions at times leading to violence. Such protest forms arose mainly out of various economic factors, e.g., wage reduction, withholding of wages, upward revision of wages, unsatisfactory working conditions, etc.. We have also seen that some sections of the workers

TABLE 7.10

No. of establishments and size of workforce in jute, cotton and coalmining industries in Bengal (1872 - 1910)

| (a) Jute | | | (b) Cotton | | | (c) Coalmining | | |
|----------|--------------|------------|------------|--------------|------------|----------------|--------------|------------|
| Year | No. of mills | Work-force | Year | No. of mills | Work-force | Year | No. of mines | Work-force |
| 1880-81 | 19 | 33,994 | | | | 1872 | 44 | N.A. |
| 1890-91 | 25 | 61,563 | | | | 1881 | 37 | N.A. |
| | | | | | | 1891 | 56 | 15,000 |
| 1900-01 | 34 | 110,057 | 1900-01 | 10 | 8,000 | 1903 | 110 | 30,566 |
| 1910-11 | 58 | 199,670 | 1910-11 | 15 | 15,000 | 1910 | 129 | 62,363 |

Sources : (a) and (b) : COI, 1911, Vol.V, Part I, p.79. (c) 1872 : SAB, Vol.IV, pp.117-19; 1881 and 1903: *Burdwan District Gazetteer*, 1910, p.117; 1891 and 1910: BPAAR, 1910, App.I, para.8; COI, 1911, Vol.V, Part II, p.231.

resorted to action leading to public disorders in which the cause of action arose out of sectarian religious or communal issues. An interesting point

for consideration arises at this stage: in Bengal the coal mining industry started earlier than the textile industry¹⁹ but its growth quickened almost around the same time as that of the latter (i.e. from about the 1890s). A sizeable workforce was assembled at both coal and textile sectors by the last quarter of the 19th century as evident from Table 7.10 above.

Surprisingly, despite the location of such a considerable workforce in the coal-mining belt, there is no account available as yet to indicate any significant occurrence of protest actions by the workers in the collieries or of any serious public disorder arising out of these workers' resentment relating to such issues as observance of religious festivals or out of Hindu-Muslim confrontation over the practice of cow-slaughter.²⁰

Such a remarkably different behaviour pattern on the part of the coalminers becomes all the more conspicuous if we take into account the fact that many of the characteristics of the textile workers were common to the coalminers as well, while there were many others which were detrimental to the interest of the coalminers. Thus the latter were also subject to the sardari system of recruitment and supervision, and most of them worked as piece-rate contract labourers with hardly any job security. With frequent explosions and fires in the coal pits, smoke-filled galleries and poor visibility, their work was necessarily more arduous and hazardous and the underground working conditions were extremely unsatisfactory. The labour settlements (*dhowras*) of the collieries, like their counterparts in the textile mills, were perhaps more deficient in the matter of sanitary arrangements, water supply and conservancy. Quite naturally, therefore, these were prey to pestilences like cholera, small pox, malaria, respiratory disorders etc.²¹ The *dhowras* had a standard floor space of 10 x 10 sq.ft., usually quartering 4-7 persons and often even 12-13 persons.²² The atmosphere and outlook in the mining settlements were so drab and dreary that few human beings would have any inducement to continue for long spells of time in these.²³ Depicting the same dismal scenario one scholar writes: "Hundreds of square miles stretch with a pell-mell mass of coal villages and *dhowras*, darkened by soot and cinder everywhere, a veritable no-man's land where family and social ties easily snap, and drink, disease and debauchery stalk ... in broad daylight".²⁴ If such were the living conditions in the 1940s, one can imagine how much more repelling they must have been 4-6 decades earlier.

We now have to look for some plausible explanations for the lack of violent outbursts among the coalminers despite their admittedly primitive and oppressive living and working conditions. Is it possible

that the colliery workers were a relatively complacent lot because they were better paid than the textile workers? Referring to the position obtaining in the 1930s, Radhakamal Mukherjee noted that the monthly earnings of the miners were roughly one-fifth of the wages paid to textile workers and one-fourth of those of engineering workers.²⁵ It is doubtful if this was true for the late nineteenth century or even for the first decade of the twentieth century. Hunter, for example, found that the miner's pay was 'high' in the 1870s: a good miner could earn as much as half-a-rupee per day, and boys and girls working above ground received one-third to one-fifth of a rupee per day while a woman working on the 'gin' (capstan) could earn approximately one-third of a rupee per day.²⁶ Allowing for the periodical absence from colliery work, Hunter also noted that a miner's family consisting of a man and his wife with three children earned even in 1860 nine rupees or more per month, or about double the pay of an ordinary peasant or day labourer of 1873-74, and they looked well-fed.²⁷ Referring to 1914, which is closer to our period, H. Fukazawa notes that in Bombay and Ahmedabad the average monthly wage of an average worker in these two centres was about Rs.16.4 (Rs. 16-as. 6 - pias 3) and Rs.13.6 (13-9-9) respectively.²⁸ In 1900, the average wage of a jute mill coolie in Bengal was Rs.0.3 per day, i.e. Rs.9.00 per month.²⁹ Around 1910, the average wage of a coalminer was Re.0.75 per day, i.e. Rs.22.5 per month.³⁰ In view of this one may not be quite justified in concluding that paywise, the Bengal coalminers were worse off than the textile workers of Bombay, Ahmedabad or Bengal. If we keep in mind that it was quite common for all the members of a family to work in the same mine, the colliery work-people were likely to have been better-off. Besides, most miners were also used to leaving the collieries during July-August and again during November-December for attending to paddy sowing and harvesting in their respective villages. In other words, they did not depend entirely on their colliery earnings for their subsistence. A purely economic explanation in terms of the coalminers' wage levels, however, does not fully account for their relatively stable behaviour pattern and other areas of their work environment need to be explored for obtaining a better perspective.

An important factor which might have contributed towards reducing friction and thus preventing clashes between the management and the labourers was the specific character of ownership and management of the coalmines. In the jute and cotton textile industry, the ownership and the top-level management were almost the exclusive preserve of the

Europeans. This was true of the Bengal mills as also of the Bombay and Ahmedabad mills. Large-scale Indianisation started only around 1925. The inherent socio-cultural gulf between the employers and the employees in such a structural situation was bound to create a substantial communication gap. We have observed the impact of such gaps in a number of management-labour confrontations. In the coalmining industry, on the other hand, both ownership and management (barring a few top management posts in some of the larger mines) were largely in Indian hands.³¹ It can thus be argued that in the coal mines the extent of workers' alienation and communication gap was probably much less as compared to the premier factory industries.

Yet another factor that deserves attention in this context is the average number of workers per unit. If this number is very large, the workforce is likely to be unwieldy and the chances of containing an incipient eruption would be correspondingly less. Other things being equal, a relatively small workforce (per unit) is likely to provide greater scope for personal contact and hence better labour management relationship. In any case, it is likely that the heavy concentration of an assorted labour force in the jute and cotton textile units in Bengal as shown in Table 7.11 together with the close proximity of such units produced some impact on the behaviour patterns of these workers. The same table shows that the coal-mining units had a noticeably smaller workforce to contend with and it was also spread over a wider area, discouraging dissemination of unrest.

TABLE 7.11
Average number of workers in textile and coal-mining units in Bengal
(selected years)

| Year | Average no. of workers in a textile mill unit | Average no. of workers in a coal mine unit |
|------|--|---|
| 1891 | 1263 | 268 |
| 1901 | 3237 | 278 (in 1903) |
| 1910 | 3443 | 483 |

Source : Table 7.10

Additionally, one has to remember that most of the coal-mines were located in areas isolated not only from the hub of political and other influences but also from the local police stations. This could well have led to two distinct effects. On the workers' side, they would most certainly

cut off from the mainstream of life and often had no clear notions of how to go about the redressal of their grievances. Hence they had to bear their cross in silence. It would not however be quite appropriate to presume, consequently, that the coalminers were a largely semi-servile lot.³² On the management side, unlike their counterparts in the textile mills located close to the seat of power (Calcutta), the colliery owners, managers and their musclemen had a relatively free hand in 'disciplining' recalcitrant workers. The coalminers' protest actions, if any, as also the rough and ready management methods of meting out 'justice' could seldom reach the distant police stations and the even more distant seats of the local administrators. This may have been one of the reasons for the absence of reports relating to such incidents either in official documents or in the media. The annual police administration reports, for instance, did not record a single relevant incident for the entire period 1864-1912.

The very dissimilar composition of the workforce found in the coalmines and in the textile mills of Bengal also provides an important key to the understanding of their distinctive behaviour patterns. Comparing the two sets of labour force working in the coalmines of Burdwan district and in the factories of the metropolitan region, we find some striking features in their composition which, one may infer, resulted in less tension and turbulence amongst the coalminers. By 1891 – nearly forty years after the commencement of coalmining on a commercial basis – the majority of the miners were either sons of the soil or short-distance migrants from neighbouring districts.³³ This large 'local' component (mostly Bauris) as also some other segments of the workforce in the coalmines like the Santhals and the Kols usually worked as a family group. Obviously, therefore, this workforce could not have suffered the same degree of rootlessness or alienation as their counterparts in the textile mills and the unbroken family units must have served to preserve stability and reduce tension. It may be recalled here that during 1855-1885 the jute mill labourers were mostly Bengalis and the upcountry migrants started pouring into the Bengal mills in a big way from about 1891. Thus it may not be entirely accidental that the jute mills did not experience any noticeable unrest amongst the workforce till about 1895.

Again, as compared to the jute mills workforce, the caste and religious composition of the colliery workers would seem to be

less conducive to communal or community-based tensions. Very few upcountrymen, especially from the communal trouble-prone areas of Bihar and U.P., could be found among the coalminers even till the end of our period as evident from the 1911 census data presented in Table 7.12 below. It shows that out of a total 62,000 mine workers in the Bengal region, hardly 3,000 were upcountrymen (Rajput, Chhetri, Chamar, Muchi, Goala etc.). Similarly, Muslims too formed a very small segment (app. 400 in number) and it is quite likely that most of them were also sons of the soil. It is noteworthy in this context that the only reported Hindu-Muslim riot in this sub-division over the issue of cow-slaughter during the entire period of our study took place in the year 1895 in Kendua, an upcountry labour settlement of the Bengal Iron & Steel Co. at Kulti.

TABLE 7.12
Religion and caste composition of workers in Bengal coalmines : 1911

| | Male | Female | Total |
|-----------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Hindus (only major groups) | | | |
| Bauri .. | 12,463 | 11,106 | 23,569 |
| Santhal .. | 10,657 | 6,878 | 17,535 |
| Chamar & Muchi | 1,247 | 232 | 1,479 |
| Goala .. | 978 | 61 | 1,039 |
| Rajput/Chhetri .. | 426 | 5 | 431 |
| Brahmin .. | 221 | 1 | 222 |
| Namasudra .. | 114 | 18 | 132 |
| Tanti .. | 62 | 5 | 67 |
| Muslims (all sects) | | | |
| Pathan .. | 164 | 11 | 175 |
| Jolaha .. | 146 | 33 | 179 |
| Saiyad .. | 40 | 0 | 40 |

Source : COI, 1911, Vol.V, Pt.II, Table XVI, pp.362ff, SI.II.

The contrasting caste and religious composition of the jute mill workers is brought out in Table 7.13. This workforce had a large long-distance migrant component as pointed out in the previous chapter, and they mostly belonged to the communally sensitive districts of U.P. and Bihar. Moreover, the Muslim workers in jute

mills, numbering more than 64,600 formed nearly 32.4% of the workforce in 1910-11, whereas in the collieries they comprised only about 0.6 per cent of a total of roughly 62,300 miners during the same period.

TABLE 7.13
Bengal jute mill workers distributed by major religious
and caste groups : 1911

| | | |
|-----------------------------|----|----------|
| Total workers in 1910-11 | .. | 1,99,670 |
| Hindu (major groups) | | |
| Chamar | .. | 21,510 |
| Chasi Kaibarta | .. | 11,922 |
| Brahmin | .. | 8,883 |
| Tanti/Tantua | .. | 7,296 |
| Teli/Tili | .. | 7,217 |
| Bagdi | .. | 6,094 |
| Muchi | .. | 5,842 |
| Dosadh | .. | 5,555 |
| Goala | .. | 4,993 |
| Kayastha | .. | 3,476 |
| Dhanuk | .. | 2,216 |
| Pasi | .. | 1,551 |
| Mallah | .. | 1,291 |
| Namasudra | .. | 635 |
| Muslims (all sects) | .. | 64,624 |
| Sheikh | .. | 41,029 |
| Jolaha | .. | 19,745 |
| Pathan | .. | 3,118 |
| Saiyad | .. | 1,824 |

Source : COI, Vol.V, Pt.I. P.79 and Pt.II, App.to Table XVI/Pt.IV, p.383.

Finally, a number of upcountry castes traditionally associated with criminal activity during our period figured quite prominently among the jute mill workers but were virtually non-existent among coalminers (e.g. Dhanuk, Dosadh, Mallah, Pasi etc.). Certain other volatile Bengali caste groups (such as Bagdi, Goala, Chasi Kaibarta, Namasudra etc.) were also insignificant in number in the coalmines but not in the jute mills. These three compositional aspects of the two sets of labour force also could have exercised some influence on their behaviour patterns in their respective work places, i.e. in jute mill and coal-mining sectors.

Apart from the caste and religious break-up of the workers, the work pattern and the work culture found in collieries were radically different from those prevalent in manufacturing and processing industries like jute and cotton textiles. In the latter case, the production process had to be sustained almost throughout the year, if not round the clock – a style of work which was totally alien to those nurtured in agriculture which has been traditionally a seasonal activity in India. On the contrary, quarrying and coalcutting used to be almost totally suspended from June till October-November due to accumulation of water in the pits. This was also the time of intensive agricultural activity in Bengal in which the miners could participate as most of them hailed from the neighbouring rural areas and could take advantage of the seasonal closure of pits to return to their villages. To some extent this practice brought mutual benefits: the employers were not required to pay wages to a non-productive workforce during the idle months and the miners could fall back upon agriculture for additional income. Moreover, from the beginning of coal-mining activity it was customary for the miners to remain absent from colliery work during religious festivals (pujas and *parabs*) and also during the period when the workers had marriage ceremonies to attend.³⁴ In this respect, therefore, one of the major issues (viz. observance of religious festivals) behind industrial workers' agitations in and around Calcutta - which at times could turn violent - was absent in the case of the coalminers. Thus, vis-a-vis the textile workers, the colliery workers had a less regimented work schedule which, in turn, made for a less tension-prone workforce in the collieries.

VI

During the closing years of the nineteenth century a growing turbulence amongst the industrial workers was followed by a considerable strengthening of the agency for enforcing public order. There was, however, a relative lull during the first four years of the twentieth century. Industrial relations in Bengal entered a new phase in the wake of the anti-partition and swadeshi movement commencing from the middle of 1905. The general excitement created by agitation had undoubtedly been mainly responsible for the large number of industrial

strikes which occurred in Bengal since the beginning of August 1905 though some, such as the Railway guards (Europeans and Eurasians of the EIR) strike, had no possible connection with the agitation.³⁵

The impact of the anti-partition and swadeshi movement on the industrial relations in Bengal was also acknowledged in the official chronicle of the administration of Bengal under Lt. Governor Andrew Fraser (1903-08). According to it the political agitation played a large part in the industrial unrest which was a marked feature of the quinquennium. The industrial unrest found expression in a series of strikes affecting the most important industries of Bengal. Quite understandably such an account put the blame for this unrest at the door of the "briefless Bengali Hindu Barristers who made it their business to found and preside over Unions." Such Unions, according to this official account, were formed for Indian Press employees, mill hands and railway servants, and their object was not to promote the interest of the employees but "by fomenting imaginary grievances to create a widespread spirit of disaffection against European supervisors in the world of industry, just as political agitators sought to stir up a spirit of revolt against the constitutional authorities of Government."³⁶ We have analysed in earlier sections that the workers' grievances on most occasions were far from imaginary.

How far the spirit of the time influenced the workers and led to a new admixture of economic and political issues can best be illustrated from a study of the happenings at the Fort Gloster Jute Mill (Howrah) during October 1905. This is how the Superintendent of Police, Howrah reported the developments: "The hands at Fort Gloster Jute mill, who were recently on strike but returned to work a fortnight ago, have been giving fresh trouble. Ever since their return to work there has been, I am informed by the manager, a spirit of unrest in the mill." He believed that the European assistants had to put up with a good deal of impertinence from the workmen, who approached them in gangs, shouted 'Bande Mataram' loudly and then ran away. "On Wednesday last week, the Manager Mr. Forester had two of these offenders caught and took them to his office to ascertain their names. Having got their names, he released them. His action, however, appeared to meet with the disapproval of the hands and an arrangement was come to amongst them by which at 7.55 p.m. on Thursday, or five minutes before closing time, the whole 9,000 workmen, who are nearly all local Bengalis, were to shout at one time 'Bande Mataram'. This was accordingly done, and on the (European)

assistants in the different departments attempting to stop the disturbances, they were surrounded and several of them pushed about". The manager, hearing this disturbance, proceeded to the spot, arriving at 8 o'clock, just after the lights had been extinguished according to the usual custom. Along with one European assistant he went to a department of the mill to find out the situation there. They found about 200 men "noisily issuing from the building, shouting 'Bande Mataram' in the faces of the (European) assistants, evidently trying to provoke the latter into striking some of them." The manager ordered his assistants to seize some and accordingly two of them were caught. A rush to rescue them was made and in course of the resultant melee the two seized men escaped. The manager admitted having knocked down two men in 'self-defence' on which, according to him, the remainder ran away, crying out that they would deal with him the next day. The manager contacted the D.M. and sought police protection. On the following day the S.P. visited the mill along with an European Inspector and 20 men of the District Armed Police and "found everything quiet, the work going on more or less as usual". A case was instituted under sections 143-147 IPC but evidence of identification was difficult to obtain. After some enquiry two men were arrested on the following Monday. On this the whole mill stopped work and left the factory premises. They refused to return to work unless the case against those two men was dropped, which the management and police declined.³⁷

There was something significant and novel in the attitude of the workers as would be evident from this part of the S.P.'s report: "When I was at Bowreah (Fort Gloster Jute Mill), I talked with some of the strikers and asked them why they had gone out. They replied that they were all brothers in the mill, all brothers in Bengal; that in arresting the two men ... they had all been insulted". This new mood of the working class, largely the product of growing nationalist sentiments, was also admitted by the IGP who held that this strike was due to the rebellious anti-European spirit that the swadeshi movement had aroused.³⁸

The tempo of industrial unrest drawing sustenance from the rising tide of nationalism persisted during 1906 also and as many as five major incidents of unrest took place this year and nine in 1912. Of the more important of these, the strike by the employees of East Indian Railway (Bengal section) during July 1906 deserves special mention. For the first time the workers openly made an issue of racial discrimination. Their other demands were for higher wages, better uniform and improved

housing facilities. It came to light that while the maximum pay of a first class native station master was only Rs.45/- per month, that of a European station master, who had less work and less responsibility than a native station master was Rs.200/-.³⁹ Even the well-known pro-administration and British-controlled English daily, *The Statesman* found it difficult to justify such blatant racial discrimination. Commenting on the above strike by the railway employees, it observed that no nation, however patient or submissive, could "be flouted or defied without avenging itself on its oppressors. Unless we are much mistaken, the retribution has made its appearance in Bengal in the form of a consciousness of unity and a realisation of the power of combination, the first fruits of which we have just seen in the temporary paralysis of trains of the foremost railway of India."⁴⁰ The level of participation was extensive and the strike lasted for more than a week. Almost all natives left the work. Numerous small stations from Howrah to Asansol and Burdwan inclusive were closed. Goods traffic was practically at a standstill. Though this strike was crushed by the railway authorities with active assistance from the Government, this "first workers' strike in India, directly connected with national movement" was not in vain. It brought into being one of the first Indian trade unions, the EIR Employees Union.⁴¹

In August 1906 about a thousand workers of a factory belonging to the Clive Jute Mills (Hooghly) downed tools, demanding better working conditions and against humiliating treatment by the British management. During this strike a jute workers' union was formed under the leadership of A.C. Banerjee.⁴²

A still bigger strike took place in November 1907 on the EIR, Asansol being the centre of the strikers' activities. They demanded higher pay, opposed long hours of work and also voiced resentment against ill-treatment by the management. The strike was started by about 150 Indian locomotive drivers but was soon joined by the European and Anglo-Indian drivers also under the leadership of a British worker named Engleken. The authorities got frightened and placed the railway station under guard of armed police and European troops.⁴³ Though the strike was ruthlessly crushed and Engleken punished, the solidarity of the employees of all social groups was displayed for the first time in the trade union history of India.

Contemporaneous police intelligence noted that one part of the policy of the anti-partition agitationists was embarrassment of Government and the obstruction to public work by organisation of

industrial strikes.⁴⁴ These strikes were not confined to Government offices; M/s. Burn & Co. of Howrah was one of the first to be affected. The strike in the Bengal Secretariat Press in 1905 "originated in a wild idea among the agitators" that by preventing the publication of the Calcutta Gazette, in which the notification of the partition was to appear, they could obstruct the implementation of the partition scheme. "Needless to say", the intelligence report boasted, "they failed to hinder the publication of the Gazette". The official reports took note of the leading role played during this period by barristers A.C.Banerjee and A.K.Ghosh besides B.C.Chatterjee and Premtosh Bose.⁴⁵ Bose was "one of the chief engineers of the strikes in the government printing presses and in all the strikes on the EIR as well as the Calcutta Dock strike" of March 1908.⁴⁶ A.C.Banerjee, another prominent nationalist figure in the labour front, took an active part in a number of strikes during 1905 (e.g. the Burn & Co., printing presses, Calcutta Tramways and jute mill strikes). Along with Bipin Chandra Pal, he was considered by the administration to be "undoubtedly the most dangerous among the agitators."⁴⁷

By about 1908, however, the nationalist leaders displayed a distinct slackening in their efforts at mobilizing the workers.⁴⁸ One wonders if this was due to their failure to enthuse the upcountry labourers—both Hindu and Muslim, or because of their increasing preoccupation with secret societies and the tide of terrorism. It is quite possible that both these factors were at play. Moreover, there is no evidence available so far to show the impact of swadeshi movement among the coalminers. Their geographical isolation could be one reason. One is left guessing nevertheless if the political leaders of the district, not to speak of the Calcutta-based swadeshi leaders, considered themselves unequal to the exertions needed to mobilise the Bauris and Santhals who formed the bulk of the coalminers.

VII

On an aggregative view, unrest arising out of economic as well as non-economic but non-religious issues far outweighs the religion-based turmoils. It may be observed that almost 50 per cent of the incidents of the former category (i.e. those based on economic and other secular issues) took place during a brief span of eight years (1905-12). One

reason for this must have been the unprecedented rise in the commodity prices which caused considerable hardship to the labourers and other low-paid fixed-income workers. This is borne out by the fact that the workers in at least nine mills, factories and other establishments had to resort to strike demanding higher wages – one each in 1895 and 1897 and seven during 1905-07.⁴⁹ This was also the period when the anti-partition and swadeshi movement had awakened an unprecedented intensity of mass consciousness on nationalist anti-British lines. This naturally accounted for a spirit of defiance of the authority among the workers.

The second notable feature of the unrest relating to economic and other secular issues is that a large number of them, especially during 1905-07, took place between the months of August and November. The traditional festival months in Bengal are from late September to early November, and the industrial workers and other low-paid employees like others feel ill-equipped for some extra financial cushion to meet their social obligations entailing substantial additional expenditure. Such ad hoc wage increase demands assumed in later years the form of demand for 'puja bonus'. Another factor which operates behind demand for wage increase during this period (especially during September- November) is the fact that the prices of foodgrains in Bengal usually show an upward trend during this post-sowing and pre-harvesting interregnum. These months in Bengal are traditionally known to be the scarcity months or the 'lean' period.

The third significant feature to be noticed is the variegated forms of protest action by the workers and their spontaneity, quite often with a touch of modernity in terms of present-day trade union practices.

Fourthly, though the management at times expressed bewilderment as to the workers' cause of action, it was more due to the former's inability to understand the language, the sentiments and the needs of their workforce; the latter, on the other hand, knew what they were asking for and there was a discernible purposiveness and clarity in their demands. By and large, they do not appear to have been driven by any irrational urge for violence. The absence of any large-scale machine-wrecking incidents clearly points to this.

Fifthly, we have observed a remarkably different behaviour pattern among the Bengal coalminers as compared to the textile and other workers – an almost total absence of any significant protest action by the former. It is quite possible that due to their geographical isolation,

whatever form their demand for redressal of grievances might have taken, it did not attract public attention. We have, in this context, attempted to bring out certain structural aspects of the coal-mining industry (e.g. the mines remaining closed during the rainy season on operational ground which afforded an opportunity to the miners to resume their agricultural activity during such interregnum and thereby avoid the monotony of an extremely arduous work, the special composition of the mine workers, the practice of their working in the same place as a family unit and so on). It is quite possible that these and a few other special features analysed earlier accounted for a lack of pronounced unrest among the coalminers.

Finally, no student of labour history would miss the beginning of a sense of power of combination and a certain degree of working class solidarity in Bengal. Though not marked among the colliery workers, this characteristic was manifest in a large number of protest actions, e.g. in Champdani (1895), Kankinara (1895), Baranagar jute mills (1896), Bowreah cotton mills (1899), Calcutta Tramways (1905), Calcutta printing presses (1905 and 1906), Kharagpur Rly. Workshop (1906) etc. Most of the strikes and demonstrations cut across the workers' regional and religious distinctions. We have also seen that with the beginning of the twentieth century, religion-based agitations largely gave way to assertion of economic and other secular demands. This led to the eventual development of a new consciousness about working class solidarity, though it remained largely subterranean during the closing years of the nineteenth century. By the second decade of the twentieth century, however, this "new consciousness of its own solidarity and value" on the part of the Bengal labouring class was an admitted aspect of industrial relations in Bengal.⁵⁰

How did the administration react to this new phenomenon of unrest and protest action by the industrial workers? Available evidence suggests a fairly recognisable difference in its attitude and response during the pre- and post-1905 periods. In the earlier phase it was marked by a certain degree of ambivalence. The administrators were at times quite critical about the high-handedness and inconsiderate behaviour of some of the European agents and managers – for the latter's failure to provide proper accommodation and sanitation facilities for their workers, insensitivity towards the latter's demand for holidays to observe principal religious festivals, the practice of withholding one week's pay of the labourers, occasional unprovoked misbehaviour with workers and use of firearms

against demonstrating workers and so on. In spite of such periodical fulminations, however, the administration as a whole was found to be too obliging to the European management's demands – whether for extending police support or otherwise through non-enforcement of quite a few of the mandatory provisions of the Factories Act.⁵¹

With the beginning of the anti-partition agitation in 1905, the Government displayed an even more blinkered vision and adopted a decidedly hardened stance. The ruthless severity with which the strikes by the railwaymen in November and December of 1907 were dealt with is a clear pointer to this change in attitude. The mill managers were getting liberal support and sustenance from the administration during this post-1905 period when quite a few protest actions by workers were marked by distinct nationalist and anti-establishment overtones though their demands had apparently economic and other types of secular content. There was obviously a change in the threat perception of the governmental authorities during this period. They perceived dangers from two points: the increasing power of combination which was adversely affecting the commercial interest of the ruling class; the other possibility, which continued to cause some anxiety to the establishment, was the probable conjunction between the political agitators and the restive workers. That such a congruence did not eventually materialise can be largely ascribed to the apathy of the political leaders, and to that extent the administration was spared the ordeal of fighting at another front.

NOTE

1. *Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission* (hereafter RIFLC), 1908, Vol.I, para 26. Also see the *Royal Commission on Labour in India*, 1933, page 333.
2. GOI Home (Judl.) A/Sept. 1883/218.
3. Presidency Div. Commissioner's Annual Admn. Report for 1885-86.
4. COI, 1911, Vol.V, Part I, p.79.
5. *Salami* (lit. money paid in deference) was extracted at two stages — once at the time of induction and thereafter on a weekly or monthly basis during employment. Quite often the workers' wages were paid through the sardars, thereby facilitating continued extortion.
6. For a brief historical survey of the Sardari system as well as its implications, see – *Labour Investigation Committee report on an enquiry into conditions of labour in plantations in India* by D.V.Rege (hereafter Rege Committee report).GOI,1946, pp.21-28; Ranajit Das Gupta, "Material conditions and behavioural aspects of

- Calcutta working class, 1875-1899", *Occasional Paper No.22*, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1979.
7. One should exclude from this category the informal or lower level supervisory role of the cooly sardars and the Bengali baboos who did the job of book-keeping etc. None of them really formed part of the formal management levels.
 8. BAAR, 1895-96.
 9. GOI Home (Judl.) Progs/Dec.1895/241.
 10. Bengal Judl.(Police) Progs./January 1896/6.
 11. *Pratt Report*.
 12. Bengal Judl.(Police) Progs./January 1896/10.
 13. A number of workers expressed their resentment on this score in their evidence before the Indian Factories Comm. : see *IFC Report*, 1890, pp.77-78,79,85.
 14. BAAR, 1895-96.
 15. *The Englishman* dt. 1 and 8 April 1896 (RNNB for week ending 11 April 1896.)
 16. Bengal Judicial (Police) Proceedings/Dec.1899/22-29;
" " " " /Jan.1900/48-52.
 17. *ibid.* report of J.Kennedy, Officiating Commissioner, Burdwan Division.
 18. Rice prices in Bengal had gone up considerably between 1891-1896 from 16.4 seers per rupee in 1890-91 to 12.1 seers per rupee in 1896. Likewise the unweighted index no. of wholesale prices was 107 in 1903, 106 in 1904, 116 in 1905, 135 in 1906, 142 in 1907 and 149 in 1908.
 19. The Raniganj-Asansol coal belt is located at a distance of about 150-175 miles from Calcutta, covering an area of nearly 600 sq. miles. The first attempt at coal mining was made in 1774 at village Damulia but was given up after a while. It was resumed in 1824: SAB, Vol.IV, p.117, Table Sl.21. The first professionally organised coal-mining operation started in 1816 near a village called Egara in this belt in 1816: *ibid.*, p.119.
 20. *Final report on the survey and settlement operations in the district of Burdwan, 1927-34*, Vol.II, p.120
 21. *ibid.*, pp.121-123; *Report on an enquiry into the conditions of labour in the coalmining industry* (hereafter RCLC), 1946, pp.42-44.
 22. Radhakamal Mukherjee, *The Indian Working Class*, pp.250-51.
 23. RCLC, p.32.
 24. R.K.Mukherjee, in his Préface to B.R.Seth, *Labour in the Indian coal industry*, p.X.
 25. Radhakamal Mukherjee, *op.cit.*, p.116.
 26. SAB Vol.IV, p.115.
 27. *ibid.*,
 28. H.Fukazawa, "Cotton mill industry" in V.B.Singh(ed.), *Economic History of India (1857-1956)*, 1975 reprint, p.235.
 29. *Prices and wages in India*, 35th issue, Table 23(17); Ranajit Das Gupta, "Material conditions ...", p.48.
 30. *Burdwan District Gazetteer*, 1910, p.118.

31. *Burdwan Survey and Settlement Report, 1927-34*, Vol.II, App.XI pp.145-51 (containing a list of coal-mines in Asansol subdivision indicating names of owners etc.).
32. See C.P.Simmons, "Recruiting and organising an industrial labour force in colonial India : the case of the coal mining industry", *IESHR*, Oct. - Dec. 1976, pp.455-85.
33. COI, 1891, Vol.III, Report, p.93.
34. SAB, Vol.IV, p.114-15; *Burdwan District Gazetteer*, p.134.
35. GOI Home (Pub.)Progs.A/June 1906 175-186, especially Progs.175 which contains a report by the Bengal IGP, para 61 listing 9 instances of industrial unrest during 1905.
36. *Administration of Bengal under Sir Andrew Fraser, KCSI, (1903-8)*, p.24.
37. GOI Home(Pub.)Progs.A/June 1906/175.
38. *ibid.*
39. *Bengalee* dt. 3 July 1906.
40. *Statesman* dt 29 July 1916.
41. E.N.Komarov, "Social thought in Bengal in late 19th and early 20th centuries", I.M.Reisner and N.M.Goldberg (eds.) *Tilak and the struggle for Indian freedom*, 1966, pp.275- /6.
42. *ibid.*, pp.276-77.
43. *ibid.*, p.278.
44. F.C.Daly, *Note on the growth of revolutionary movement in Bengal* (hereafter Daly's Note), 1912, p.7.
45. *ibid.*
46. GOI Home (Poll.) Progs.A/March 1910/33-40.
47. Report by C.Stevenson-Moore, I.G.of Police, Bengal, dt.2 Dec. 1905: GOI Home (Poll.)Progs.A/June 1906/172. For details about the attitude of nationalist leaders, vernacular news-papers etc. towards the problems of the workers, see Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi movement in Bengal*, Ch.V. For a general survey of the Indian nationalists' and Indian newspapers' attitude towards labour, see Bipan Chandra, *The rise and growth of economic nationalism in India*, 1966, ch.VIII.
48. Sumit sarkar, *op.cit.*, p.241.
49. Sec App. VII.
50. *Report of the Committee on industrial unrest in Bengal*, 1921, para 5.
51. RIFLC, 1908, Sec.V on the extent to which the provisions of the Act were either totally ignored or only partially observed. Also see GOB Genl.Mis.File No.107/15-17, Aug.1889 which shows that the DM 24-Parganas was in favour of exempting certain employers from the mandatory obligations under the Factories Act of 1881.

8 Political Terrorism : A New Dimension In Public Order Problems (1905-12)

If the uprisings of 1857 lacked an explicitly consistent ideology, it was more than made up during the swadeshi and anti-partition movement in Bengal half-a-century later. The resultant unrest unleashed the forces of swadeshi and swaraj which challenged the very basis of the legitimacy of British rule in India. This time the beginning was perhaps less stormy but more deeply rooted in the national psyche. It also brought to the fore some of the hitherto untapped segments of the population with a vast potential for organised political action. Apart from a grand alliance of landholders in Bengal, the youth and the middle class were drawn into the vortex of the new movement in such great numbers and with such intensity of passion that the traditional administrative institutions and methods for maintenance of public order were found to be in complete disarray. In fact, marked differences of opinion appeared at the policy-making levels of the Central and provincial Governments as to the appropriate means of containing the rising tide of revolutionary violence in Bengal. Indeed during the 1905-1912 period, for the first time in the history of British administration in India, a new dimension was added to the problem of public order : an undisguised threat to the Raj as distinct from a threat to local law and order.

In tracing the roots of political crime and terrorism in Bengal, one may identify three phases of its development. The first phase roughly

covered the period from the early nineteenth century till about the 1870s, the period during which the white-collar babu class was created as a necessary tool of the expanding British colonial rule in India. Macaulay obviously had this class in mind when he observed in the mid-nineteenth century that the "physical organisation of the Bengali is feeble even to (the point of) effeminacy ... His pursuits are sedentary, his habits delicate, his movement languid."¹ Around the same time Governor General Bentinck described the Bengalis as a "mere flock of sheep good only for their valuable fleeces, and having no political or military character whatever".² This typology of the effete Bengali stuck for the years to come and could not fail to leave a deep impression both on the alien administrator and the native mind. One would suspect that many Bengalis themselves internalised the notion of effiteness even in the late nineteenth century.³

Such a collaborative and loyal babu class, alive and receptive to western education and ideas, however, was soon to be the first target of the unabashed racialism and arrogance of the ruling class as soon as the former started asserting its capabilities and rights. In terms of periodisation, one can put the beginning of the second phase around 1881-83, with the European racial outbursts centering round the proposed Ilbert Bill which intended to allow the native magistrates to try Europeans guilty of criminal offences.⁴ Bengali sensitivity was not slow in reacting. Initially it started on an intellectual plane through the writings of Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore.⁵ The accent in these and numerous writings and speeches of other noted Bengalis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was on a national awakening coupled with a powerful invocation for acquisition of physical prowess.⁶

As a scholar has aptly remarked, if ever there was a case of life imitating art, it took place among the early Bengali revolutionaries.⁷ Bankimchandra's *Anandamath* and *Debi Choudhurani*, in particular, provided the model - the disciplined, ascetic groups of *sannyasis* and *santans*⁸ (children), bound by their oath of secrecy and dedication in secret conclaves (*maths*) for service to the Mother by destroying the *feringhee* (foreign) nests. Interestingly enough, it fell to the lot of a twentieth century Debi Choudhurani — Miss Sarala Ghosal,⁹ a young Bengali lady in her early twenties, to give a concrete shape to some of those ideas. In their respective autobiographical sketches¹⁰ Charu Datta and Sarala Debi have captured the mood of young Bengal in the nineteenth century, the incipient revolt against European racialism and arrogance. Rabindranath's autobiography (*Jibansmriti*) also shows that

he too had to go through a morning ritual of *kusti* (wrestling) in their family *akhara*. At least six *akharas* (physical culture centres) and sporting/athletic clubs were established in Calcutta alone between 1898 and 1900.¹¹ But these physical culture centres were not associated with any political objective. Hence it is not surprising that the first one to attract the attention of the police was that started by Sarala Ghosal in 1902,¹² her father having been associated with the Indian National Congress. At least three other prominent physical culture groups were formed also in 1902 — one in Midnapur (under Jnanendranath and his brother Satyendranath Basu, and Hemchandra Kanungo) and two others in Calcutta: the Anushilan Samiti (at 2, Madan Mitra Lane under Satish Basu) and the Atmonnati Samiti (at Central Calcutta, with Nibaran Bhattacharya, Indranath Nandi, Bipin Behari Ganguli and others). All these persons later took prominent part in the revolutionary upsurge in Bengal during the post-partition movement. The second phase of the genesis of political terrorism may be said to have ended around 1902-03.

II

The third and significant phase in the growth of political terrorism occurred during 1905-06. It was during this period that the cult of physical culture got intertwined with the wider political programme of the swadeshi and anti-partition movement commencing in mid-1905. There was a prolific growth of open and secret samitis in many parts of Bengal¹³ and the actual onslaught of terrorism through overt acts did not take long to surface as we will observe shortly.

However, the 'volunteer' movement involving the youth was known in Calcutta as early as 1900 and it mostly took the form of gratuitous service rendered by young men and students during natural calamities like flood and famine and also for the purpose of keeping order at festive congregations and at political meetings. With the rise of the *akhara* as a general institution, these youths went in for physical training and particularly favoured fencing and lathi-play taught to them by professionals. This craze for physical training became a very prominent feature of the movement after 1905. Young Bengal "eagerly seized upon the notion of making itself into a semi-military body, and set itself diligently to work to train itself in lathi and sword exercises, archery, drill and discipline. The Anusilan Samity in particular identified itself with the movement."¹⁴

In certain ways this phenomenon was a notable departure from the past. During the nineteenth century and earlier, wielding of the *lathi* in Bengal was an exclusive preserve of the lower classes in society such as the Bagdis and Namasudras. The *lathials* of the zamindars were drawn either from this class of people or from the upcountrymen of Bihar and U.P. or from amongst the lower order of Musalmans. Lathi-play as such, therefore, came to be associated with the lifestyle of these so-called *chhotolok* (literally, the uncivilised or lowly people) and considered not befitting the station of a *bhadralok* (literally, the civilized ones, the higher castes). It was for the first time, in the early twentieth century that educated middle class Bengalis took to lathi not only as a part of the physical culture wave but also as a purposeful group activity. The motivation might have been vague to start with but with the progress of the anti-partition and swadeshi movement the focus became sharper till it synchronised with the call for the liberation of the motherland in which 'Bande Mataram' became the war cry.

This process was undoubtedly hastened by a combination of factors — the patriotic fervour in the literary works of Bankimchandra and Rabindranath, circulation of life-sketches of Italian and Irish freedom fighters and of pamphlets like *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal), *Raja Ke* (Who is the King?), *Bartaman Rananiti* (The present war strategy) etc. School teachers and the organisers of the newly burgeoning samitis and akharas became powerful disseminators of this new wave of political awakening and activism. Quite a few of the native newspapers, notably *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Jugantar*, *Sandhya* and *Bande Mataram* kept up the anti-British tirade and helped in fostering a spirit of defiance.¹⁵ Commenting on the role of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, a confidential official report noted: "The true policy of that paper was systematic opposition to all measures of Government in a spirit of malignant hostility. It lost no opportunity of attacking an European official or of representing Europeans generally as tyrannical bullies whose favourite diversion was kicking defenceless Indians ... It was the Patrika ... that first started the doctrine of retaliation, advising the children of the soil in dealing with Europeans to return frown for frown and blow for blow."¹⁶

III

The prospect of partition was haunting the Bengalis since December 1903 when the Government of India published proposals for the transfer

of Chittagong and Dacca divisions to Assam. The Bengal Landholders Association (Calcutta), the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, the zealous watch-dog of European commercial interests, and even a leading pro-establishment Calcutta newspaper (*The Englishman*) joined hands in opposing the proposal. It was officially noted that "the agitation against the (proposed) partition was not one which was confined to professional agitators but ... (they) found for the first time the solid support in agitation of wealth and influence which enabled them to organise and carry on a widespread campaign against the Government such as, for want of support and resources, they had never been able to organise before."¹⁷

All these developments took place between December 1903 and June 1905. On 8 July 1905 the Government of India published the full scheme of the partition of Bengal and announced that it had already received the sanction of the Secretary of State. Though there was an outcry against this scheme in the press and on the platform, the protest was initially confined to Calcutta. Reports received from the districts indicated that the announcement of the partition did not at first appear to have created any strong feeling even in many of the ten districts which subsequently became the storm centres of the agitation.¹⁸

The people of Bengal looked upon the partition as an act of perfidy against them and thoughts of retaliation were not slow in coming. In a protest meeting at Bakarganj on 26 July 1905 a song was sung by a student which began with the words, "Why are you all asleep and in torpor? Bengali heroes, wake up with sword in hand". This song has been officially described as the 'first open call for violence that came to notice.'¹⁹ This was followed by 'violent seditious leaflets', two of which were widely circulated and created quite a stir: *Raja Ke* (Who is the King?) and *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal). These leaflets contained 'violent vituperation against the English', gave the open 'call for violence and bloodshed' and marked the 'public commencement of the propaganda of murder and outrage'.²⁰

The attempted wrecking of the special train of the Lt. Governor of Bengal at Naraingarh (Midnapur district) on 6th December 1907 added a new dimension to the anti-partition movement. It is with this incident that the existence of secret societies for the purpose of political assassination and other forms of revolutionary crime first became an accepted fact in Bengal.²¹ (A similar attempt was made in October 1906 in French Chandernagore but came to light only after the Naraingarh

incident). It also confirmed the secret information gathered by the Bengal Special Branch about the growth of 'a party ... determined on substituting physical force for constitutional agitation'.²²

According to information given by one of the accused in the Manikola Garden case of Calcutta (May 1908) the first secret society in Bengal came into existence in 1900.²³ In that year a secret meeting was held at which P. Mitter (Barrister-at-Law), Miss Sarala Debi Ghoshal and a Japanese named Okakura were present. This meeting resolved to start secret societies with the object of assassinating officials and supporters of the Government. Thereafter secret societies were formed in many districts in Bengal and one such active society in Kustia (Nadia district) was organised by Jatindranath Mukherjee, then a clerk in the Finance Department in Bengal Secretariat.²⁴

For about a year since August 1905, political activism did not go beyond noisy processions, shouting of *Bande Mataram* and 'vigorous' enforcement of boycott of foreign goods. A few political crimes were attempted but they did not attract official attention at that time. Appendix IX gives a list of all reported and recorded incidents of political violence which took place in Bengal (both east and west Bengal) from 1906 to 1912. Based on this raw data, Table 8.1 classifies the identifiable political crimes and attempts a quantitative analysis of the available data with a two-fold objective : firstly, to gauge the intensity of political violence at different points of time (1906-12), and secondly, to assess the relative gravity of violence as between the different categories of political crimes. Accordingly, political crimes of this period have been classified under five major heads, having sub-heads. Each sub-head has been given a specific weightage (rating scale value) on the basis of the degree of planning and organisation for the commission of the crime and the extent of its seriousness (as viewed in the Penal Code in terms of punishment prescribed). Yearwise number of incidents under each head/sub-head has also been shown. Instances like the attempted wrecking of the Lt. Governor's train, the attempted murder of Allen (District Magistrate, Dacca) have been included both under category I (planned murder, including attempt on the life of Government officials) and categories IV (bomb outrages) and V (other political crimes). So is the case with the attempted murder of the Mayor of Chandernagore. Similarly the murder of Mrs. and Miss Kennedy at Muzaffarpur has also been given double ratings under both I and IV. In other words, a particular incident (e.g. attempted wrecking of the Lt. Governor's train) may have components of one or more categories of crime (see Note to Table 8.1).

Chart 8.1A relates the incidence of political dacoity and total political crimes and portrays the trend in the volume (absolute number) of political crimes.

TABLE 8.1
Incidence of political violence in Bengal (1906-1912) :
No. of Crimes/Intensity Value

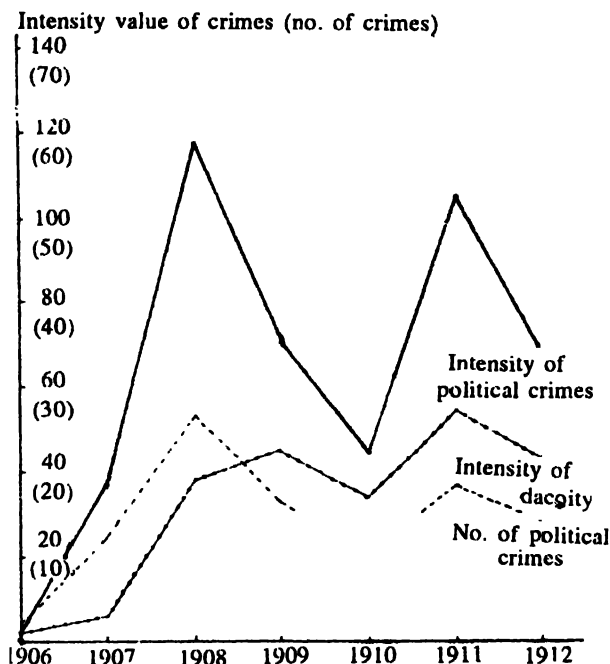
| Categories of Crime | Intensity scale* (1-10) | No. of Crimes/Intensity value | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|------|---------------------|
| | | 1906 | 1907 | 1908 | 1909 | 1910 | 1911 | 1912 | Total for 1906-1912 |
| I. Planned murder of Govt. officers (successful) | 10 | - | - | 1/10 | 1/10 | - | 3/30 | 1/10 | 6/60 |
| -do- (causing wounds) | 6 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| -do- (attempted) | 4 | - | 3/12 | 2/8 | - | - | - | - | 5/20 |
| -do- of other persons (successful) | 6 | - | - | 5/30 | 1/6 | - | 2/12 | 1/6 | 9/54 |
| -do- (attempted) | 3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Accidental murder of non-officials (e.g. during dacoity) | 4 | - | - | 1/4 | - | 1/4 | - | - | 2/8 |
| -do- wounding of non-officials | 2 | - | 2/4 | - | 1/2 | - | - | - | 3/6 |
| II. Attempted dacoity/ robbery (minor) | 1 | 2/2 | 2/2 | - | - | - | - | 1/1 | 5/5 |
| (major) | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Successful (minor) | 3 | - | 1/3 | 1/3 | 3/9 | 1/3 | 1/3 | 2/6 | 9/27 |
| (major) | 5 | - | - | 7/35 | 7/35 | 6/30 | 10/50 | 7/35 | 37/185 |
| III. Bomb outrages (minor) | 1 | - | - | 4/4 | 1/1 | - | - | - | 5/5 |
| (major) | 3 | - | - | 1/3 | - | - | - | - | 1/3 |
| (very serious) | 5 | - | - | 2/10 | - | - | 1/5 | 1/5 | 4/20 |
| IV. Other political crimes (minor) | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| (major) | 3 | - | 2/6 | - | 2/6 | 2/6 | 1/3 | 1/3 | 8/24 |
| (very serious) | 5 | - | 2/10 | 2/10 | - | - | - | - | 4/20 |
| No. of crimes | - | 2 | 12 | 26 | 16 | 10 | 18 | 14 | 98 |
| Intensity value of crimes | - | 2 | 37 | 117 | 69 | 43 | 103 | 66 | 437 |

*Note : A distinction is made here between an incident and a crime. A particular incident may have within itself components of one or more major categories

of crime. Thus, for instance, the attempted wrecking of the Lt. Governor's train on 6th December, 1906, will be deemed to have been a planned murder of a Government officer (attempted) and at the same time a 'very serious' political crime of 'other' category, explosives and detonators having been used. Again, the attempted murder of the Mayor of Chandernagore by bomb explosion will come under category I & III above. App. IX only lists the incidents yearwise, whereas in this table those incidents have been dissected and separated in terms of the broad categories of political crimes with attendant intensity values.

Source : Appendix IX.

Chart 8.1A
Intensity curves of political crimes in
Bengal (1906-1912)



SOURCE : Table 8.1

In terms of sheer volume, political dacoities (attempted and successful) far outweighed all other types of political crimes taken together. Thus, there were 51 crimes of this nature out of a total of 98 political crimes during 1906-12. The dacoities maintained a steady pace from 1908, reaching a high point in 1911.

We may note here that the groups or organisations (e.g. a samiti) which committed dacoities were not necessarily specialising in this from of crime only. More often than not the reverse was true. For instance, the Dacca Anushilan Samiti committed a number of dacoities as well as murders.²⁵

Yet another feature of the incidents of this period is that, barring dacoities, all the other forms of crime were in the nature of terroristic attacks by small groups of two or three persons, though such efforts were backed up by a large body like a samiti. By and large these acts took the shape of individual terrorism.

During our period, the samitis or secret societies could not organise themselves for mounting a frontal attack in strength against centres of governmental authority. The most spectacular of such attacks was to take place nearly eighteen years later in the shape of the Chittagong Armoury Raid of 1930.

Of about 51 incidents of dacoity, as many as 36 took place in the eastern Bengal districts – Dacca district leading with 14 cases, followed by Bakarganj (7), Mymensingh (5), Faridpur (4), Tippera/Comilla (3), Rangpur (2) and Noakhali (1). In western Bengal, the districts reporting such cases were Khulna (5), Jessore and Hooghly (3 each), Nadia (2), Bankura and 24-Parganas (1 each). In regard to political murder (including attempts), Dacca again topped the list along with Calcutta (5 each), followed by French Chandernagore, Midnapore, Faridpur (2 each), Mymensingh, Howrah, Muzaffarpur, 24-Parganas, Bakarganj and Noakhali (1 each). That is, 10 such cases were from East Bengal districts, 8 from West Bengal districts and 1 taking place in Bihar (Muzaffarpur) was committed by two young Bengali boys despatched from West Bengal. All the seven bomb explosion incidents were reported from areas around Calcutta.

It would appear, therefore, that the districts of Burdwan and Birbhum in western Bengal and Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Bogra, Pabna, Malda and Chittagong in Eastern Bengal were free from overt acts of revolutionary violence. This need not be taken to imply that these areas were free from the revolutionary movement. An official account of the spread of the revolutionary groups around May 1908 admitted that "there was not a Bengali-speaking district in the whole province which was entirely free from it;"²⁶ and of the western Bengal districts, Bankura, Midnapur, Hooghly, Howrah, Nadia, Khulna

and Jessore were reported as the districts "where revolutionary movement had got a very firm hold."²⁷

IV

The philosophy of political dacoity of the swadeshi era, which came to be popularly known in Bengal as *swadeshi dakati*, was mainly provided by Aurobindo Ghosh. In a series of articles published by him in *Jugantar* between 1906 and 1908, he sought to provide a moral justification for commission of dacoities. His argument ran somewhat on the following lines: As long as the revolutionary work remained in its infancy, expenses could be met by subscriptions. But as the work advanced, he argued, more money was needed and this could be exacted by the application of force, if necessary. Since the objective of the revolution was beneficial to the community, it was just, according to him, to collect money in this manner. Even admitting that theft and dacoity were crimes because they were violative of some social principles, he asserted that no such stigma could be attached to a *swadeshi dakut* whose ultimate aim was the good of the community: "So no sin but rather virtue attaches to the destruction of this small good for the sake of some higher good", and that "if revolutionaries extort money from the miserly or luxurious members of society by the application of force, their conduct is perfectly just."²⁸ Such exhortations did not fail to have the desired impact and it is notable that the first crop of political dacoities in 1908 followed soon after such preachings (see Appendix IX).

Of all categories of political crimes of our period, political dacoities needed the largest degree of participation in actual operations. Necessarily, therefore, participants in this form of crime had a very wide organisational base which, in turn, meant that the degree of secrecy was not likely to be of a high order. This was later admitted by a well-known revolutionary Bhupendranath Datta, the younger brother of Swami Vivekananda : "there had been a large addition to the (secret) society's membership immediately after a political dacoity had been committed at some place. Latterly the societies devoted their attention more to augmenting their membership than to procuring genuine youths, and the result was that when ... numerous arrests were made, many of these youths, as soon as they were arrested, revealed all secrets."²⁹ This perhaps explains the series of gang dacoity cases³⁰ involving a large

number of suspects which could be launched by the police after some initial handicap during 1906-07. Noteworthy gang cases included the Nangla case (1909-10), the Howrah case (1910-11), the Jessore-Khulna case (1910-11) and perhaps more importantly, the Alipore conspiracy case (1908) and the Dacca conspiracy case (1910-12).

Interestingly enough, the intensity curve of dacoities roughly corresponds with the commencement of these gang cases. Since these gang cases launched by the Government involved a large number of persons and consequently a large amount of money was needed for their defence, dacoities provided a means for raising the necessary funds. An additional factor which might have indirectly added to the spate of dacoities is the fact that from the end of 1908, a number of samitis were driven underground by being declared unlawful under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908.³¹ As their legitimate sources of income by subscriptions and donations dried up, these samitis must have had recourse to raising funds through illegal means, mainly dacoities. This is also corroborated by a former revolutionary: "As no money for revolutionary work was forthcoming from the public and the little that was, from time to time, received from the few briefless barristers who acted as leaders, was not sufficient, the secret revolutionary societies had ... accepted as a fixed principle the idea of procuring money through political dacoities".³²

A dacoity operation was generally referred to as '*kaaj*' (literally, work, action) by political activists.³³ It is interesting to note that this very phrase was used by the professional dacoits of nineteenth century Bengal. A fairly accurate account of the manner in which political dacoities were committed, including the organisational structure, selection of targets, procedures of attack and retreat, details of dress and equipment etc. could be reconstructed on the basis of the information available in official records of police investigation, court trials and information obtained by the police from their 'sources' or agents.³⁴

The modus operandi of political dacoities may now be reviewed under three broad heads, namely, Planning and preparation, Operation, and Disposal of booty. Selection of target (i.e. house to be looted) was the first phase of planning. Among the well-organised samitis it was expected that every member should furnish information about possible targets in his area. The Dacca Anushilan Samiti succeeded in perfecting this system under which every initiated recruit had to submit a written report (village report) showing, among other things, the following details

of his village : (i) number of inhabitants of the village and their castes; (ii) number of the following classes of people in the village — educated, uneducated, rich, poor, labourers, cultivators, merchants and businessmen; (iii) topography; (iv) description of buildings, ghats and waterways; (v) full particulars of hats, bazars and means of communication by land, water, rail and telegraph; (vi) distance and direction of means of communication with police station, sub-divisional and district headquarters; (vii) particulars of schools, post offices and telegraph offices; (viii) location of old temples and ruined or empty houses in the neighbourhood; (ix) local members and sympathisers of the organisation and also its opponents. Obviously such detailed information greatly facilitated the planning of dacoities.

The selection of the actual target was done by the leadership of the Samiti (central or local) in consultation with one or more local members. The houses generally selected were those of rich money-lenders or shopkeepers (usually Sahas by caste) or of well-to-do people known to be hostile to the samiti. It appears that during the initial phase the swadeshi dacoities were committed indiscriminately and in an unplanned manner. Subsequently greater circumspection was noticed in the selection of targets : "In the earlier cases big bazars or hats were attacked and shops looted indiscriminately. In more recent cases the houses of rich individuals have been selected".³⁵ According to a noted revolutionary, the original intention of a swadeshi dacoity was to rob the English. "But presumably as it was found much easier to attack and plunder unarmed inhabitants of the country than either Government or Englishmen, it happened that when ... actual dacoities came to be undertaken, it was the former alone who were invariably robbed."³⁶

One of the techniques adopted by some of the secret societies was to post anonymous threatening letters. The recipients of such threats (and at times obscene letters) were European and native officials, zamindars and tradesmen. Letters to the zamindars and traders generally stated that they would be facing reprisals in the form of dacoity if they continued to oppose the swadeshi cause.³⁷

Plan of action consisted of (i) reconnaissance of the area and preparation of a plan of the target house including the entry and exit points etc., generally undertaken by an experienced member of the group. (ii) Selection of members for the action and assignment of their respective roles : In most cases the activists were selected from distant places and included perhaps one person having local knowledge. For

instance, the dacoities at Baiguntewari (Dacca) of 23.1.1912, Ainpur (P.S.Gheor, Dacca) on 21.2.1912 and Kola (P.S.Srinagar, Dacca) on 18.11.1912 were found to be the work not of any group of Dacca district but of the Madaripur group of Faridpur district; the latter obviously "thought it safer to operate away from home, and all these outrages took place on the other side of the great Padma river in the Dacca district".³⁸

(iii) Selection of the pre-action assembly point : This was usually an old temple, an empty or ruined house, river bank or a *char* land. In the Baiguntewari dacoity (Dacca district) of 23.1.1912, for instance, the rendezvous was the ruins of an indigo factory close to the target. (iv) Post-action retreat : Where waterways were convenient, especially in the eastern Bengal districts, they arrived and escaped by boats — usually the *ghasi* and sip types. In such cases, the assembly point was generally on the river bank or a convenient *char* land. Routes of arrival and escape were largely determined by the topography of the area. Travel by bus and train and partly on foot was a common feature for western Bengal. Both at the time of assembly and of retreat, the gang members divided themselves into smaller groups of twos and threes. Arms and other equipment were usually carried in bedding rolls, ordinary boxes or inside other contrivances like umbrella, musical instruments etc. (v) Allotment of duties, time schedule and rehearsal : Each part of the operation was generally timed in advance after careful study and rehearsal; by and large the time schedule was maintained. In two instances at least, strict adherence to the pre-planned time schedule resulted in the failure of the gang to collect the major part of the booties. In the Kaliachar dacoity of 30 October 1911 (Mymensingh district) and the Dhuldia dacoity (also of Mymensingh district) the leader sounded the closing bugle strictly in accordance with pre-determined timings but by then the other members were in the process of opening the iron safes which contained the bulk of the money. So perfect was their discipline that further attempt was stopped as soon as the bugle sounded. [The oldtime professional dacoits too had their own closing signals, e.g. the leader shouting 'Jaal Gutao' (draw the net) and so on.]

Referring to the operational aspects of dacoities committed by the Faridpur gang in 1912, an official account noted that "their method was terroristic. Armed with firearms, masked and bearing torches, they advanced in a body on the houses selected, made a great uproar, threw down bombs and fired shots to keep off the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, and finally lined up before departure to the sound of a

bugle."³⁹ In Dacca district, the war cry of 'Kali Maikee Jai' or 'Hara Hara Bom Bom' was quite common during dacoities.

Equipment of the gang usually consisted of arms and ammunition and other accessories. Arms usually consisted of DBBL/SBBL guns, rifles, revolver, automatic pistols, throw-down crackers, *ramdaos*, daggers and swords.⁴⁰ The members of the gang seldom carried or used a lathi in any dacoity, unlike their professional predecessors for whom this was the chief weapon. Improvised torches (*mashal*) were known to have been carried by the gangs in some cases at the time of raiding a house, as professional criminals used to do to overawe the villagers. Use of throw-down crackers and firing in the air from guns were also resorted to by this new breed of swadeshi dacoits for achieving a similar objective.⁴¹ The other implements were mainly for breaking open doors and iron safes. These included flogging hammers (sledge hammer type), cold chisels in holders, crowbars, axes and files.

Adequate attention was also paid to details of dress and disguise. They were usually dressed in coats with dhoti worn in *malkocha*, shoes and masks. The masks were made of thin dhoti cloth sewn up in the shape of a bag; the open end of the bag was drawn over the head to cover up to the shoulders and holes were cut for eyes, nose and ears. It was a very effective device against identification during the operation. Masks made of red cloth were used in about 10 dacoities in Dacca, Mymensingh, Faridpur and Bakarganj districts during 1909-12. (The professional criminals too used some form of mask with the help of the *gamchha* but more often the device of blackening their faces with soot served as an effective disguise).

Perhaps typical of a bhadralok dacoit, too much of attention was sometimes paid to the sartorial aspect. Thus in the Dhuldia dacoity (Mymensingh district) the leader and his second-in-command were attired rather flamboyantly — long yellow knee-length boots laced up the front, light coloured pants and black coat with several pockets from which protruded the handles of various weapons. The leader also carried a bright hilted curved sword and a whistle. In one hand he carried a revolver and in the other, a bottle torch.⁴² A light coloured cloth wound about the face concealed his features.

The strength of participants in a dacoity operation could be anything between 14 and 50. There was invariably a leader or commander directing the operations. He was assisted by a second-in-command who was normally in charge of guards (armed) covering the approaches to the house.

The signal for closing the operation was generally given either by blowing a whistle or by a bugle call. In a few cases oral calls for closure ('complete' or 'come sharp' — in English) were given. On hearing the call for closure, the gang members regrouped in front of or behind the house, formed up and were ordered by the commander to march off — sometimes in single file, sometimes in twos.

Disposal of booty does not seem to have posed any problem. Gold ornaments were usually melted and turned into bars as early as possible. For this they used to take the help of some goldsmith or even blacksmith. Portions of the loot were entrusted to members and sympathisers for disposal. It appears that in some cases at least strict accounts of all such outstanding articles were kept. There is no clear indication regarding the ultimate destination of the loot but it was a general practice for the outlying units to deposit part of the booty with the central organisation after deducting their current and working expenses. It can be reasonably presumed that part of this fund was also used for defraying the expenses connected with the growing number of criminal cases, more especially the gang cases or the criminal conspiracy cases. For instance, police investigation disclosed that the loot in the following three dacoity cases were partly used for the defence of the accused in the pending Dacca Conspiracy case⁴³ : Haldia Hat dacoity (P.S.Lohajang, district Dacca) of 30.9.1910, Kalargaon (P.S.Bhederganj, district Faridpur) dacoity of 7.11.1910, Dadpur (P.S.Mahendiganj, district Bakarganj) dacoity of 30.11.1910.

Before closing this section on swadeshi dacoity, a few general observations may be in order. The swadeshi dacoity gangs maintained a hierarchical organisational structure like their professional counterparts but it was more rigid and the participants were better drilled and disciplined. In the second place, the lathi had given way to more lethal weapons like guns and explosives — a legacy which persisted for decades after swadeshi dacoits vanished from the scene. Finally, the *modus operandi* indicated here on the basis of police records might have had variations as between the western and eastern districts of Bengal mainly for topographical reasons. But between 1908 and 1912 the *modus operandi* had developed certain stereotyped features. This, in turn, led to a change in the habits and *modus operandi* of ordinary criminals as well. Thus the officiating S. P. of Bogra (Tripura Charan Mukherjee) reported in 1909 that ordinary bad characters (e.g. burglars etc.) discovered that it was easier for them to combine and commit depredation by a show of

force than to commit burglaries by stealth singly or in pairs.⁴⁴ In the same year the IGP (Bonham-Carter) also remarked that the dacoities in Rajshahi division were mostly committed by men who in other years had resorted to burglary and that the increase in the number of dacoities was due to the substitution of open violence for stealth. This change in the habits of some of the criminals was probably one of the indirect results of the political agitation.⁴⁵

V

For the first time in the history of Bengal, a wide cross-section of the Bengali middle class actively participated in organised crime, albeit of a different category and with a novel motivation. The partition of Bengal in 1905 marked the beginning of this phase. The crimes ranged from simple violation of the law by disobeying restrictions on meetings and processions and by chanting 'Bande Mataram' at one end of the spectrum to armed dacoity, bomb-throwing and murder at the other. Interestingly enough, such crimes were described in earlier official reports as 'revolutionary' or 'political'; these acts were labelled as 'seditious', 'anarchical' or 'terroristic' at later stages.

The participants in the swadeshi and anti-partition movement are known to have included the landed aristocracy, the middle class and perhaps a sprinkling of the lower order of the society also. But our information about the actual participants in political violence (i.e. political crime) remains partly conjectural. There is considerable divergence between the views put forward in most of the official discourses and those advanced by many of the nationalist leaders and participants in political activism. While examining some of these views, we will also see that some important official documents were guilty of suppression of facts.

Before we take up the issue of actual participants in political crime, it is necessary to know who their patrons, leaders and financiers were. By far the largest number of the leaders and patrons of the samitis were from the legal profession – barristers, lawyers and muktears. Thus of the eleven 'principal promoters' of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti in 1906, as many as eight were pleaders and one was a doctor. The Swadesh Bandhab Samiti of Barisal town had a zamindar as its President (Aswini Kumar Datta) and a pleader as Secretary. This was true of most of the

samitis in Dacca, Bakarganj, Mymensingh and Faridpur. The next largest category of leadership was provided by teachers. Then came the zamindars, taluqdars, traders etc.⁴⁶

At times the elderly persons were not directly involved in organisational activities but were associated as advisers, often connected with more than one samiti. Persons of this age group also provided financial support to various revolutionary groups without themselves being organisationally or operationally involved. Thus, according to an important revolutionary of the time (believed to be Barin Ghosh), the following persons were among the leading financiers during 1905-08: Subodh and Nirode Chandra Mullick of Wellington Square, Calcutta; Rajendranath Mukherjee @ Misri Babu of Uttarpara (Hooghly); Charu Chandra Datta, ICS Judge (Bombay) and son of Kalidas Datta (Dewan of Cooch Behar State); P.Mitra, Bar-at-Law (Calcutta); Manaranjan Guha, a mine owner of Giridih (Hazaribagh district).⁴⁷

How were new members recruited to such organisations? Many school and college teachers acted as talent-spotters and so did the old members.⁴⁸ After identifying such a person – mostly from amongst students and youths – he was usually put through a set of initiation rituals. The rituals and vows of the initiation ceremony could differ in detail from group to group. In some cases the ceremony took place before an image of goddess Kali or Durga, or in front of a burning fire. Some were asked to hold a sword in one hand and the *Gita* in the other. The Dacca Anushilan Samiti had devised a more elaborate ritual including vows to be taken at four stages : initial vow (*Adya Pratijna*), final vow (*Antya Pratijna*), first special vow (*Pratham Bishesh Pratijna*) and second special vow (*Dwitiya Bishesh Pratijna*). The main theme of these vows was unquestioned obedience to the dictates of the leader. Surprisingly enough, unlike the Indra Nandi group's vows, the Dacca Anushilan Samiti vows made scant reference to dedication for the service of the country or for its liberation.⁴⁹

Salkeld's report (1908) on the Dacca Anushilan Samiti observed that "formerly the organisation was practically confined to Hindu bhadralok; now low class Hindus have been largely recruited".⁵⁰ This is also evident from the autobiographical account of a noted Bengal revolutionary: "We made recruits from all classes of the people in Bengal. We noticed that it produced an unexpected social result, a feeling of equality existed among the national workers and they disregarded the harmful don't-touchism of the higher castes" which, according to him, "the Brahmo Samaj failed to bring about in Bengal inspite of all their endeavours."⁵¹ Another socially useful result of it was that even the

orthodox Hindus accepted this blurring of caste distinctions and thus a new 'spirit of toleration' was generated.⁵²

How tenable are the above claims – both from official and political quarters — regarding the level of participation of the lower caste Hindus? As we shall see shortly (ref. Table 8.3), the claims are not corroborated by the number of persons convicted in political crimes during 1907-17. It is quite possible, however, that only a few of them were taken during actual operations and the conviction figures naturally reflected this phenomenon.

Tables 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4 provide some idea about the socio-economic profile of the persons involved in political crimes in Bengal:

TABLE 8.2

Age-group of persons convicted in Bengal of political crimes or killed in the commission of such crimes (1907-1917)

| 10-15 years | 16-20 years | 21-25 years | 26-30 years | 31-35 years | 36-45 years | over 45 years | not rec- orded | Total |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|-------|
| 2 | 48 | 76 | 29 | 10 | 9 | 1 | 11 | 186 |

Source : *Sedition Committee Report*, 1918.

TABLE 8.3

Persons convicted in Bengal of political crimes or killed in the commission of such crimes distributed by caste and religion (1907-17)

| Higher caste Hindus | Lower caste Hindus | | Europeans and Eurasians | Total | Remarks |
|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|----------------------------|-------|---------|
| 166 | 16 | | 4 | 186 | * |
| Brahmin | 65 | Mahisya | 3 | | |
| Kayastha | 87 | Kaibarta | 3 | | |
| Baidya | 13 | Saha | 2 | | |
| Rajput | 1 | Karmakar | 1 | | |
| | | Tanti | 1 | | |
| | 166 | Subornabanik | 1 | | |
| | | Others | 5 | | |
| | | | 16 | | |

*Note : (a) Though 13 Muslims were convicted, at least 8 of them in specific offences, they did not figure in the SCR. Such omission is quite remarkable; for details of Muslims convicted in connection with the revolutionary movement, see, *List of persons connected with the revolutionary and anarchical movement in Bengal, Part II: Conviction Register* (compiled upto the end of 1920), pp. 1, 44, 51, 57, 62; *Bhadralog Crime Directory*, 1915, pp. 33, 70. (b) The number of lower caste Hindus would be more than that shown in this table. As against only 2 Sahas shown here, at least 12 others were convicted : Ref. *List of persons convicted*, serials 618 - 632.

TABLE 8.4

Persons convicted in Bengal of political crimes or killed in the commission of such crimes distributed by profession/occupation (1907-17)

| | | |
|--|---|-----|
| Students | - | 68 |
| Teachers | - | 16 |
| Land owners | - | 19 |
| Persons of no occupation | - | 24 |
| Trade and commerce | - | 23 |
| Doctors and compounders | - | 7 |
| Clerks and persons in Government service | - | 20 |
| Newspapers and presses | - | 5 |
| Cultivators | - | 1 |
| Opium smugglers | - | 1 |
| Not recorded | - | 2 |
| Total | - | 186 |

Note : The figures in the above tables do not include persons bound over to keep peace or to be of good behaviour.

Source : *Sedition Committee Report*, 1918

A careful analysis of these tables reveals that the involvement of boys of tender age (10-20 years) was quite substantial. The 10-25 age-group supplied the bulk of the participants in actual acts of political violence - 126 out of a total of 186. Of these, students were preponderant in number (68 out of 126). It looks as though the elderly or even middle-aged persons were too discreet to get directly involved or at least to get caught in overt acts of political crimes. Commenting on the Dacca samitis, the D.M., Dacca observed in 1907 that the average lower age limit of the members was 12 years. Reporting a year later on the same group but on the basis of information obtained from a large number of seized documents, another officer noticed that children of still lower age were joining the samitis: "now children of nine take solemn vows to renounce all worldly ties for the samiti", and he commented with a certain degree of alarm that though "admirable in the interests of a revolutionary organisation ...(this development was) pernicious to society in general."⁵³ It is only to be expected that the depth of ideological content in boys of such a tender age could not be but superficial. But this deficiency was more than made up by their honesty of purpose, depth of emotional involvement and sheer physical courage.

In fact, on the basis of the information gathered from official records and reminiscences of revolutionary activists, we can agree with Bhupendranath Datta that these boys proved to be of a much better quality than many of their elderly mentors.⁵⁴

Looking at the caste and religious break-up given in the tables one wonders whether the official viewpoint was not substantially correct, since as many as 166 out of the 186 incarcerated or killed belonged to the upper caste Hindus. This caste and class composition of the participants is further substantiated by the occupation table which shows that the majority of the participants were gainfully occupied, and that the patterns of occupation (e.g. teachers, landowners, traders, doctors and compounders, clerks etc.) indicate that they presumably belonged either to the higher castes or to the intermediate castes like Sahas etc.; similar would have been the case with the students and with those shown without any fixed occupation.⁵⁵

The above three tables also bring out some significant negative aspects about the participants and these too should call for some comment. Firstly, no Muslim figures in Table 8.3 though 4 Europeans/Eurasians are included. These three tables are based on data given in the *Sedition Committee Report*. It is surprising that this report was totally silent about the number of Muslims who were actually convicted for their participation in political crimes, and also showed only two Sahas (lower caste Hindus) whereas at least 13 Muslims and 12 more Sahas (in addition to the 2 shown in the Table) were convicted during the 1905-17 period for participation in "revolutionary and anarchical movement in Bengal."⁵⁶ Such omission could not be without a purpose, and this was obviously to underplay the participation by the Muslims and those not belonging to the upper caste Hindus so that the movement could be depicted in a manner which suited the divisive policy of the government.

Despite such distortions in official accounts, the fact remains that the leaders of the revolutionary movement largely failed to evoke a sympathetic response from the majority of Muslim inhabitants in Bengal. The attitudes, utterances, rituals and behaviour patterns of the revolutionary leaders contributed in no small measure in discouraging Muslim participation. As we have noted earlier in this section, the initiation ceremonies of a recruit including the vows administered were typically Hinduized. As insistence on these and other behaviour patterns (e.g. *Brahmacharya*, *Gita*path, Puja etc.) became increasingly manifest, the Muslim youths were understandably deterred from entering the ranks

of the secret societies. In addition, the growing sense of separation – a search for identity of the Bengali Muslims and the emergence of pan-Islamism, coupled with the government's carrot and stick policy would also provide a part of the answer. Moreover, the coercive methods adopted by many zamindars and their agents including the strongarm tactics of groups of swadeshi volunteers (mostly Hindus) must have further alienated the Muslim peasantry and the middle class which the administration was not slow in exploiting by offering liberal promises and patronages to the Muslim community.

Were any serious efforts made on the part of the leaders of such organisations to encourage Muslim participation? The efforts of Aswini Kumar Datta of Barisal (Bakarganj) were notable in this regard. According to Nathan, the Dacca Division Commissioner, the "Swadesh Bandhab Samiti ... made the most sustained and vigorous efforts to enmesh the Muhammedan peasantry and the Namasudras in its net ... Aswini Kumar Datta's tour in the rains of 1907 (were) largely devoted to this end ... But the most audacious bid which the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti made for Muhammedan support was when they procured Leakat Hossein to come to the district in order to preach that the salvation of a true Muhammedan in India lies in rebellion against the British Government".⁵⁷ The large number of popular swadeshi songs invoking Hindu-Muslim combined efforts to fight against the alien British Government would make one believe that efforts to encourage Muslim participation in revolutionary activities continued at different levels and in many parts of Bengal.⁵⁸ But, as an old revolutionary reminisced, only a handful of Muslim revolutionaries could be recruited in the early phase of the movement and efforts in this direction did not make much headway. Apart from the persistence of a certain degree of mutual distrust from both sides, the Muslim community, according to him, was "unprepared for the revolutionary cult at that time."⁵⁹

Despite such limitations, the part played by a number of Muslims in the revolutionary activities of this period deserves special mention. Thus, there were quite a few Muslims (e.g. Leakat Hossein, Ismail Hossain Seraji, Abul Kasem, Abul Husain, Gaznavi, Rasul, Din Md. Bux, Abdul Gofur, Karam Ali etc.) who took active part in the swadeshi movement and suffered imprisonment. Leakat Hossein was a prominent swadeshi orator and nationalist labour organiser.⁶⁰ Ismail Seraji was a Muslim

preacher who firmly believed Hindu-Muslim unity could go a long way toward the extermination of the 'white robbers' and 'demons'. He toured the eastern Bengal countryside extensively between 1905 and 1908 preaching communal amity and the utility of *swadeshi*. At times sizeable crowds of Hindus and Muslims (including *pardanashin* women) numbering between 2000 and 4000 attended his addresses.⁶¹ Sheikh Karam Ali was the composer of a number of popular patriotic Bengali songs, invoking the bond of unity between Hindus and Muslims and urging them to fight together against the foreign oppressor. These songs were sung during the *swadeshi* movement and were deemed to be seditious by the government.⁶² An even more obscure name is that of Arshad Ali, a mason of Harinarayanpur (Noakhali district), who composed a nationalist song of an unusually high order to be sung at the Noakhali District Conference of 1910.⁶³ Besides the above, one of the 'principal promoters' of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti was Munshi Hedayet Bux, a *swadeshi* preacher.⁶⁴

The second notable negative feature about the composition of the participants in political crimes was that the Brahmos, another significant social group, also did not join the ranks of the terrorist secret societies in adequate numbers.⁶⁵ One may perhaps attempt to explain this phenomenon as the combined effect of two factors : the Brahmos were a small but cohesive social group and the Tagore family continued to exercise a strong influence on this group. It was well-known that the scion of the Tagore family – Rabindranath, though always an ardent *swadeshi*, could never countenance the cult of violence and terrorism which was made clear in a number of his writings and speeches.⁶⁶ It is quite possible that Tagore's views were shared by most other Brahmo families in Calcutta and the mofussil.

The third negative aspect about the participants as evident from the occupation table (Table 8.4) is that there was hardly any involvement in such cases by landless peasants and workers. By and large, this would have been true of the overall political movement of this period. For this, the blame may be laid on the limited socio-political horizon of the leaders of the movement. Of the few notable exceptions, we have mentioned the role of A.C. Banerjee and others in the chapter on Industrial Workers' Unrest. There was a fair degree of awakening among the industrial workers, especially the

Bengalis, which the nationalist leaders failed to sustain or to integrate with the mainstream of revolutionary liberation movement.

VI

The partition of Bengal was announced on 8 July 1905 and the first terroristic attack occurred on 6 December 1907 with the attempted wrecking of the Lt. Governor's train, followed by the attempted murder of Allen (D.M., Dacca) on 23 December 1907. However, the most daring and sensational act took place on 30 April 1908 with the mistaken killing of Mrs. and Miss Kennedy whereas the intended target was Kingsford, former Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta. The latter incident led to largescale searches and arrests resulting in the unearthing of the terrorists' den at Maniktala garden (Calcutta) in May, 1908.

Judging by the official reports and administrative actions, one can clearly map out the contours of their threat perception during the 1905-1912 period. Till about early 1906, there was a general tendency on the part of the administration to pooh pooh the movement for use of swadeshi goods and boycott of foreign goods as a failure. Perhaps one of the first officials to grasp the significance of the movement was the Inspector-General of Bengal Police who described it in January 1906 as "the most widespread and intensive" that had "ever stirred Bengal".⁶⁷ By and large, however, the movement was viewed as nothing more than having a nuisance value for the administrators which could be manouvered through encouragement to communally divisive forces. The handling of the widespread communal outbursts in Mymensingh, Comilla and other places during 1906-07 is symptomatic of this attitude.

But between July 1905 and December 1907 – much before the eruption of political violence – the unusually large involvement of students and teachers appears to have unnerved the Government.⁶⁸ A series of repressive measures followed although during this period the upheaval was mostly in the form of public meetings, processions and demonstrations chanting 'Bande Mataram' and boycott of British goods.

The infamous Carlyle Circular (dated 10 October 1905) and its counterpart issued by Lyon, the Chief Secretary of Eastern Bengal and Assam, enjoined upon all heads of educational institutions to prevent students from being in any way associated with the movement and

prescribed as punishment stoppage of scholarships, refusal of transfer certificates after expulsion from school, rustication and caning. Thus merely for participating in the boycott movement many school boys were subjected to harsh punitive measures including indiscriminate and inhuman whipping.⁶⁹ The D.M., Barisal went so far as to compel a weeping teacher to whip his own students, the news of which prompted the Home Secretary of the Government of India to remark that "the Magistrate ought not to have awarded as many as 30 stripes on the hands" and that "12 (stripes) would be thought excessive in England."⁷⁰ In his reminiscences, Andrew Fraser, the Lt. Governor of Bengal during the crucial period, thought that the students were dealt with 'firmly but kindly'.⁷¹ In reality Fraser's long exposure to the rough and ready methods of administration which were passable in the Central Provinces could not but lead to a heightening of tension and hostility in an entirely different locale in Bengal.

Some District Magistrates took to other measures also to harass and humiliate responsible citizens. Thus Emerson, D.M., Rangpur, abused a provision of the Police Act of 1861 by appointing respectable local residents (barristers, pleaders, zamindars, pandits, teachers) as special police constables.⁷² They were required by the D.M. to attend Police Lines, perform drill in belts and with batons for one hour and ordered to report information regarding swadeshi movement, boycott, partition agitation and also to patrol streets, to prevent school boys from parading the streets and to ensure that there was no shouting of 'Bande Mataram' in any public place. Those who refused to comply were prosecuted and their cases were made over to Mohammedan Deputy Magistrates.⁷³ The D.M., Howrah inflicted similar indignities on the teachers of educational institutions and their Managing Committee members.⁷⁴

The attempted wrecking of the special train of the Lt. Governor in December 1907 marked the second phase of the administration's assessment of the threat from the political agitators. The murder of the Kennedys by bomb explosion by two Bengali youths in April 1908 and the subsequent police raids in Maniktola garden (North Calcutta) with caches of arms, ammunitions, explosives, documents along with the statements of the arrested persons (e.g. Barin Ghosh etc.) revealed the wide ramifications of secret societies. All these pointed to the magnitude of the threat to British rule. By about the end of 1908 the Dacca Anushilan Samiti also had made its presence felt.

The above transformation in the perception of the threat as between the pre-1907 period and the post-December 1907 period is evident from the following official records. On 12 October 1907, Maulavi Md. Hashim, Sub-Inspector of Police reported to the S.P. on the Dacca Anushilan Samiti as one whose objects were "(1) physical culture, (2) self-defence, (3) boycott, (4) promulgation of swadeshi principles, and (5) independence (perhaps in the long run)".⁷⁵ The D.M., Dacca (B.C. Allen) also subscribed to this view in his report to the Commissioner of Dacca Division.⁷⁶ By December 1908, however, the threat seemed more real: "It is now abundantly clear that the object of the Anushilan is to effect a revolution and overthrow the British Government."⁷⁷ The involvement of the Hindu low caste people along with the higher castes of Hindus further aggravated the danger: "formerly the organisation (Dacca Anushilan Samiti) was practically confined to Hindu bhadralok; now low class Hindus have been largely recruited."⁷⁸ Another civilian (R. Nathan, Dacca Commissioner) also reporting in December 1908 saw the unmistakable danger signal in the 'audacious bid' of the Swadeshi Samiti of Bakarganj 'to enmesh the Muhammedan peasantry and the (low caste Hindu) Namasudras in its net'.⁷⁹ He further observed that the "aims of the association ... are simply to excite the widest and deepest feelings of hostility against the British Government and to create an organisation which shall render the continuance of that Government impossible."⁸⁰

The above change in its perception is also reflected in the administration's legislative offensive. Between 1905-06, the then prevailing laws were considered to be capable of dealing with the agitators — binding down people through preventive (in reality, punitive) prosecutions under the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code (e.g. Sections 107-110 of the Cr.P.C.) for keeping public peace, for ensuring good behaviour and so on. Some overzealous officials, as we have mentioned earlier, also twisted the provisions of the Police Act of 1861 by imposing humiliating conditions on respectable citizens after appointing them as special police constables. Then came a number of restrictive measures against holding of public meetings — initially by an ordinance (Regulation of Meetings Ordinance, 1906), followed by the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act, 1907.⁸¹

The second stage of legislative repression started in December 1908 with the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act (Act XIV of 1908)

which provided, inter alia, that (a) the accused shall not be present during the trial by a Magistrate unless the latter allows it, (b) the accused shall not be represented by a pleader nor shall any person have any right of access to the court of the magistrate during such trial, (c) all persons sent up for trial to the High Court under this Act shall be tried by a Special Bench of the Court comprised of three Judges, and (d) no trial by the Special Bench shall be by jury.

It was perhaps for the first time that all the recognised canons of English jurisprudence were abandoned. On top of this, the Act also empowered the government to declare any association unlawful if in its opinion "any association interferes or has for its object interference with the administration of the law or with the maintenance of law and order or that it constitutes a danger to the public peace."⁸² Then followed the other pieces of repressive legislation to hold the native press to ransom,⁸³ to inflict corporal punishment in the shape of whipping in addition to or in lieu of imprisonment,⁸⁴ to widen the definition of explosive substance and to provide for stringent punishments including transportation for life for causing explosions of a certain nature.⁸⁵ Though all these pieces of legislation were prima facie applicable to the whole of British India, it was admitted in an official record that Bengal was to be the principal target of their application, all such legislation having been necessitated (right upto 1916) "due to the events in Bengal."⁸⁶

There was also a concerted move to expand and strengthen the police organisation. In September 1908 a Dy. Inspector-General of Police was appointed to supervise the political trials and to be in charge of all enquiries into political crimes.⁸⁷ Simultaneously, the strength of the Special Department (later known as Intelligence Branch) was augmented by 1 Dy. S.P., 9 Inspectors, 12 S.Is, 8 H.Cs. and 45 Constables at an estimated annual cost of Rs.1.23 lakhs.⁸⁸ Subsequently the Intelligence Branch was regrouped into four major wings: (a) H.Q.Staff, Reserve and Miscellaneous Enquiry Section; (b) Dakaiti Section; (c) Bombs and Explosive Section; and (d) Assassination Section.⁸⁹ Towards the end of 1912 the combined strength of the Intelligence Branch for Bengal (i.e.including Eastern Bengal) stood at 1 DIG, 2 S.Ps, 3 Dy.SPs, 24 Inspectors, 31 S.Is, 16 H.Cs and 85 Constables.⁹⁰

Two other notable developments in this context were (a) the setting up of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police in 1907 with one Dy.Commissioner (C.A. Tegart), 2 Inspectors, 6 S.Is, 12 H. Cs and 33

Constables for work connected with political crimes,⁹¹ and (b) a steady accretion to the strength of the armed wings of the Bengal Police. The strength of the Military Police in Eastern Bengal (Dacca Battalion) was raised from 100 men in 1904 to 400 by 1908,⁹² while that of the civil armed police went up from 5082 to 9314 during the same period.⁹³

Another interesting aspect of the administrative response to the terroristic outrages was the divergent attitudes at the highest levels of the colonial administration in India. Being directly exposed to such outrages, the Government of Bengal (GOB including the Government of East Bengal and Assam) took a hardline stand from the beginning. The Government of India (GOI), generally functioning from the cool heights of distant Simla, on the other hand, continued to take a relatively detached view of the Bengal happenings. Thus the GOI did not approve the stringent measures adopted by the GOB between 1907 and 1913. Hence, when the Bengal Government proposed in 1908 to prosecute the '*Sandhya*' newspaper under the Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act, 1908, Governor-General Minto thought the local Government to be 'quite wrongheaded' and did not approve the proposed action.⁹⁴ Again in 1910 and 1911 the GOB wanted to utilise Regulation III of 1818 for the purpose of internment and deportation of political leaders but the same was turned down by the GOI.⁹⁵ Further, when the GOB proposed to use against the political activists the Criminal Tribes Act (1911) and Sec.110 of Cr.P.C.(bad-livelihood cases resulting in prolonged surveillance, reporting to P.S., notifying change of residence, restricted movements etc.) the GOI did not wish to take any concrete step besides promising support.⁹⁶

The relative positions of the GOB and the GOI were totally reversed around 1913-14. It is difficult to say whether it was directly attributable to the imperial needs of the lengthening shadow of World War I or due to the change of the key personalities in both Governments.⁹⁷ But the fact remains that after 1913-14 the GOI committed itself to the policy of giving no quarters to the political agitators - moderates or extremists - and expressed irritation at the soft and conciliatory policy of the GOB, especially of Carmichael as the Governor and of Lyon as the Chief Secretary. Some members of the Governor-General's Council even went so far as to suggest recall of Carmichael and removal of Lyon.⁹⁸ There are good reasons to attribute such a drastic reversal of the stance on the part of the GOI to the fact that during 1912-13 the GOB and its officials

were not the only targets of attack. The threat had reached the threshold of the GOI too. The attempt to bomb the Governor-General (Lord Hardinge) on 23 Dec. 1912, the Lahore bomb case of 17 May 1913 and the 'proved connections of these outrages with Bengalis' were perceived to be 'indications of an unhealthy and significant state of things'.⁹⁹

The GOB, the GOI and the Secretary of State for India had sharply divergent views as to how to cope with the revolutionary activities in Bengal during the period 1907-16. Indeed, the problem created considerable tension within the Bengal administration itself. The public disorder arising out of frequent bomb outrages, political murders and dacoities was found to be 'beyond the scope and capacity of the ordinary police',¹⁰⁰ and police morale continued to be low.¹⁰¹ There was constant friction between the district police and the Calcutta police, between the Inspector-General of Police and the Government and also within the Government itself.¹⁰² Bengal administration was in a state of internal disarray, "one member of the Government ... always deprecating what the Government itself has done and throws the responsibility on some other member."¹⁰³

The attitude of the native police officers and men towards the anti-partition and swadeshi movement needs to be analysed in this connection. There is ample evidence that during the early stages of the movement the native policemen, by and large, were not only sympathetic but in some cases indirectly helpful to the agitation. Reporting on the situation in Rajshahi district, the IGP noted that "even the police were believed to be in sympathy with the pleaders and students, giving very little information to the S.P. of what was going on", and the EBA government observed that the civil police, mostly composed of Hindus, could "hardly be relied upon".¹⁰⁴ In these circumstances the Lt. Governor, while realising that it was of the greatest importance to maintain law and order, commented that it was necessary to act cautiously and that a policy of general repression was impracticable, even if desirable.¹⁰⁵

As a tactical measure the Bengal Government started altering the composition of the armed police reserves quietly by shifting the Bengali Hindus elsewhere and replacing them by Rajputs and upcountry Muhammedans.¹⁰⁶ Later these armed police reserves were fully manned by Punjabi Muhammedans since it was felt that "these have very little sympathy with any of the classes in Bengal from whom an outbreak is to be feared and certainly none with Bengali Hindus."¹⁰⁷ At this stage a

total distrust of Hindu police officers permeated the thinking of the Bengal Government which felt that "with the growth of unrest which is due largely to a Hindu movement, it would probably be unsafe to place reliance upon Hindus of any sort for the purpose of quelling popular disturbances."¹⁰⁸

It is surprising to note that the leaders of the anti-partition and swadeshi agitation totally failed to make use of the reportedly manifest sympathy of the native—mostly Bengali Hindu policemen. The ground was fertile and all that was needed was a carefully organised and sustained effort to win them over or at least to neutralise them. What the leaders did, in fact, was just the opposite. By their ill-conceived humiliation of and physical assaults on the native policemen, the latter were forced to make common cause with the colonial administration's efforts at repressing the terrorists. Bipin Pal, for instance, in his speech at a public meeting in Rangpur in January 1907, narrated how a native detective officer met him and offered to resign with 80 constables to serve the cause of the movement. Pal's response was an enigmatic one — "the time had not yet come for such actions".¹⁰⁹

By the middle of 1912, however, the administration seemed to have succeeded in tiding over the internal crisis on this score, largely due to the injudicious steps on the part of the leaders of the movement. This is reflected in the GOI's answer to a question from the Army in India Committee: "Do any grounds exist for suspecting the loyalty of the police in India? Have any representations been received from the local Governments on the subject of loyalty of the police?" The GOI's response was categorical: "No representations have been received from the local Governments ... On the contrary, in so far as the annual reports go from Bengal and EBA (the provinces in which the loyalty of the police might be accepted to be most undermined), the local Governments appear to have stood the trial. The reasons for holding that the police are likely to remain true are briefly that no constant attempts have so far been made to tamper with them; they are the constant object of attack and abuse on the part of agitators; their interests are on the side of the Government; action has been taken recently to improve their prospects."¹¹⁰

Long-term strategic or even tactical considerations were perhaps never a strong point with the emotionally surcharged leaders of the movement. Had this been otherwise, the task of the colonial

administrators would have been rendered considerably more difficult as the latter's own apprehensions between 1906 and 1909 indicated.

NOTE

1. T.B. Macaulay, "Warren Hastings", in his *Critical historical essays*, Vol. III, London 1843, p. 345.
2. Quoted in John Rosselli, "The self-image of effete-ness: Physical education and nationalism in nineteenth century Bengal", *Past and Present*, Feb. 1980, No. 86.
3. *ibid.*, p. 122. Similar views have been echoed in Rabindranath's poem 'Satkoti santanere he mugdha janani, rekhechho Bangali kore, manush karoni' (O doting mother, you have reared your seven crore progeny as Bengalis and not as men); Bankimchandra's "Bangalir Bahubal" and Sarala Debi Choudhurani's *Jibaner Jharapata*, Calcutta, 1975.
4. For an account of the extent of racial humiliation and discrimination in social, cultural, administrative and judicial matters, see Rajat Kanta Roy, *Social conflict and political unrest in Bengal, 1875-1927*, 1984, pp. 21-34, 137, 139f; Sumit Sarkar, *The swadeshi movement in Bengal*, pp. 24-25.
Regarding the European commercial-administrative axis, see Rajat K. Roy, *op.cit.*, pp. 17-26, 137-147, 370-71.
On aspects of legal inequality and the struggle to abolish it, see Nemai Sadhan Bose, *Racism, struggle for equality and Indian Nationalism*, 1981.
5. See, e.g., Bankimchandra's *Anandamath* (1882), Debi Choudhurani (1883). Lathi, *Bangalir bahubal* etc.;
Rabindranath's "Ingraj O Bharathasi" (1893), "Apamaner Pratikar" (1894); "Kantharodh" (1898) etc.
6. Notable among them were Surendranath Banerjee, Motilal Ghosh (of *Amrita Bazar Patrika*), Romesh Chandra Datta, Brahma Bandhab Upadhyay (of *Sandhya*), Bipin Chandra Pal (of *Bande Mataram*) and Aurobindo Ghosh (of *Jugantar*).
7. Hirendranath Chakraborti, "Bengali political unrest, 1905-18, with special reference to terrorism", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Oxford University, 1968, p. 117.
8. For some details about Bengal revolutionaries wandering about as sadhus and sannyasis, see the following Bengal IB reports: *Sadhus and Sannyasis in Eastern Bengal and Assam, their connection with political agitation*, 1909; C.A. Tegart's report on *The Ram Krishna Mission*, 1914.
9. She was later married to Rambhoj Dutta Choudhuri of Lahore and became known as Sarala Debi Choudhurani. Her contacts with the secret societies of even remote eastern Bengal districts were revealed in some documents seized by police in 1908: see, e.g. Bengal IB *Report on samitis in the Dacca Division*, 1908, p. 119.
10. Charu Datta, *Purana Katha*, 1962 reprint, Vol. I, pp. 11ff, 63; Sarala Debi Choudhurani, *Jibaner Jharapata*, 1975.
11. Bengal I.B. *List of Sabhas, Samitis and Anjumans in Bengal* (corrected upto 30 June 1917), pp. 15, 19, 21, 24, 32.

12. F.C.Daly (DIG, Special Department/Intelligence Branch, Bengal), *Note on the growth of revolutionary movement in Bengal* (hereafter *Daly's Note*), 1911, p.3. This was one of the earliest analytical official documents containing an account of the growth of political activism in Bengal with special reference to the 'revolutionaries' in south-west Bengal. It is interesting to note that this and other official documents described the political activists as 'revolutionaries' and they came to be called 'anarchists' and 'terrorists' at a later stage - from about 1916-17.

We have, however, come across an official account of the Bengal revolutionaries prepared earlier than *Daly's Note* (viz., *Report on samitis in the Dacca Division*, 1908) which was more descriptive than analytical and contained details of the samitis in Dacca, Bakarganj, Mymensingh and Faridpur districts.

13. For details of such samitis, akharas and physical culture clubs, see *Report on samitis in the Dacca Division, Eastern Bengal and Assam*, 1908 (Confidential report of the EBA Intelligence Branch), *List of Sabhas, samitis and anjumans in Bengal*, prepared by Bengal Intelligence Branch (corrected upto 30 June 1917): IB Library Nos. 672 and 53. Around 1908, Dacca district alone had nearly 119 branches of the Anushilan Samiti - 16 in Dacca town, 18 in Dacca Sadar sub-division (mofussil), and 21, 41 and 23 respectively in Narayanganj, Munshiganj and Manikganj sub-divisions: *Report on samitis in Dacca Division*, pp.42-43.
14. J.C.Nixon, *An account of the revolutionary organisation in Bengal*, (confd.), Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta 1917, p.13.
15. The role of the Bengali newspapers *Bande Mataram* and *Jugantar* under the editorship of Bepin Ch. Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh respectively has been discussed in Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, *'Bande Mataram' and Indian Nationalism (1906-1908)*, 1957 and *Bharater Swadhinata Andolane 'Jugantar' Patrikar daan*, 1972.
16. *Daly's Note*, p.1
17. *Daly's Note*, p.1.
18. *ibid.*, p.6.
19. *ibid.*, p.2.
20. *ibid.*, p.2. It was believed that Aurobindo or his brother Barindra Ghosh had authored both: *ibid.*, p.2.
21. Crimes of violence committed by Bengali youths with political motivation (e.g. assassination, bomb throwing, dacoity etc.) came to be labelled as 'revolutionary' or 'political' crime since 1907. See, e.g., BPAAR 1908, p.1; BPAAR, 1910, pp.1-6 and *Daly's Note*.
22. *Daly's Note*, p.1.
23. The source of this information is believed to have been Barin Ghosh: *Daly's Note*.
24. *ibid.*, p.6.
25. *Sedition Committee Report*, 1918, pp.37-38 (hereafter SCR).
26. *Daly's Note*, p.11.
27. *ibid.*
28. Some of these articles were later brought out as a booklet entitled *Mukti Kon Pathe* (Path to liberation). Also see SCR, pp.17-18, para.30.
29. From the English rendering of a serial article entitled "A chapter from the unpublished political history of modern Bengal" by Bhupendra Nath Datta, published in

Bangabani, a Calcutta weekly, Bhadra, 1330 B.S., its English translation in I.B., Bengal File No. 108/25-185/1925, confdl. Folder No. 508 (5).

30. Sec. 400 of the IPC provides for punishment (ranging from 10 years to transportation for life) for belonging to a gang of persons associated for the purpose of habitually committing dacoity. Under this provision, actual participation in any specific case of dacoity is not a pre-requisite. The fact of belonging to a gang, established through evidence, which commits a number of dacoities is enough to warrant prosecution.
31. Dacca Anushilan Samiti was declared unlawful in 1908 and the following were declared unlawful in 1909: Yubak Sammilani of Calcutta, Anushilan Samiti of Calcutta and Brati Samiti of Kumeria in Khulna.
32. Bhupendranath Datta, op.cit.
33. Daly's Note, p. 44 (confessional statement of Lalit Chakraborty dated 30.3.1910).
34. The following analysis of the modus operandi is largely based on the *Confidential Memorandum on Political Dacoities* (dt. 31.3.1913), Record Room of Bengal Intelligence Branch, Calcutta; and Bengal (EB) Police Records, File No. 689 of 1911/Record No. 29-11: Record Room of the I.G. of Police, West Bengal.
35. Para 6 of *Confidential Supplement to the Bengal (EB&A) Police Gazette* dt. 13.7.1911: Bengal Police Records, File No. 689 of 1911.
36. Bhupendranath Datta, op.cit.
37. Report of Salkeld, OSD/Dacca, para 11, in *Report on samitis in the Dacca Division*, 1908.
38. *SCR*, para 55.
39. *SCR*, pp. 37-38.
40. Firearms were used or carried by the operators in almost every case of swadeshi dacoity in Bengal, whereas in the six years ending December 1906 there was only one case in which pistols and nine cases in which other firearms were used: *SCR*, p. 20.
41. *SCR*, p. 38.
42. This was an interesting contrivance - an empty bottle filled with kerosene with a rag wick and the mouth of the bottle sealed with clay. This item was used by many gangs in eastern Bengal.
43. *SCR*, p. 34.
44. Quoted in EBPAAR, 1909, p. 31.
45. *ibid*.
46. *Report on samitis*, 1908, pp. 2, 50-60, 88ff, 116, 131, 133ff; *Statement showing the participation in political agitation of students of schools and colleges in the province*, Intelligence Branch, CID., Bengal, File No. 445 of 1913; Do, *Revised statement*, 1914; *List of present teachers and students of schools and colleges in the Bengal Presidency suspected to be concerned in the revolutionary organisation*, 31 Dec., 1916: IB, CID, Bengal.
47. Daly's Note, p. 7.
48. Sonarang National School of Munshiganj (Dacca), for instance, provided a large number of participants from the ranks of its teachers and students: *Confdl. Memorandum of the Intelligence Branch on political dakaities*, p. 9; *SCR*, p. 34.

49. Details were obtained from the seized documents of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti in November 1908. Appendix X contains the texts of some of these vows.
50. *Report on samitis in the Dacca Divn.*, 1908, p.35, containing report of H.L.Salkeld, O.S.D., dated 10 December 1908.
51. Bhupendranath Datta, op.cit.
52. *ibid.*
53. *Report on samitis*, 1908, p.35, Note of Salkeld, Officer-on-Special Duty.
54. Bhupendranath Datta, op.cit. in which he makes a distinction between the Amulya type (young, dedicated, selfless) and the Sandip type (egoistic, self-gratifying) based on these two characters in Rabindranath Tagore's novel *Ghare Baire*.
55. This finds substantiation in the details given in the *Bhadralog Crime Directory* of the Bengal IR/CID, 1915.
56. *List of persons connected with the revolutionary and anarchical movement in Bengal*, part II: *Conviction Register* (corrected upto 1920), prepared by Bengal Intelligence Branch, 1921, pp.1,44, 51,57,62 and serials 618-632.
57. Note on the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti of Bakarganj District by P.Nathan, Commissioner of Dacca Divn.dt.14 Dec. 1908, para(f) in *Report on samitis in the Dacca Divn.*, 1908, p.72.
58. *List of common Bengali songs on record in the Political Branch*, especially pp.5, 21, 22, 23, 31, 32, 34, 37, etc.
59. Bhupendranath Datta, op.cit.
60. GOI Home(Pub)Progs.B/Oct 1906/1. For some details of his activities, see Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement*, Chs.V - VII.
61. *History Sheet (No.10) of Ismail Hossain Seraji*, dt. 7 June, 1907, compiled in Special Branch, Eastern Bengal and Assam.
62. *List of common Bengali songs on record in the Political Branch*, CID (EB & A), 1912, pp.12, 16, 23, 25, 31."
63. *ibid.*, p.32 : "Bharat smashan majhe danralem ami" (I stand on the graveyard of India ...).
64. Report of Sub-Inspector Maulavi Md.Hashim dt.12 Oct. 1907, in *Report on samitis*, p.2.
65. Bhupen Datta. op.cit.
66. See, for instance, a clear denunciation of such methods in his novels *Char Adhyay* and *Ghare Baire*.
67. GOI Home (Pub.)A/June 1906/175: Report of IGP, Bengal as encl. to GOB letter No.205-p dated 25 January 1906.
68. This resulted in meticulous collection of intelligence and record keeping about the activities of students and teachers, covering practically all the districts of Bengal; see, e.g.
 - i) Intelligence Branch, CID, Bengal File No.455 of 1913: *Statement showing the participation in political agitation of students of schools and colleges in the Province* (printed), showing –
 - I. Students and masters concerned in assaults;
 - II Students who took part in the destruction of foreign goods;
 - III Students suspected of participating in political crimes;

- IV Schools participating in boycott celebrations;
 - V Masters suspected of participating in political crimes;
 - VI Students expelled for connection with political agitation; X.Students and teachers connected with seditious pamphlets; XI.Student and teacher members of secret societies;
- ii) Do, *Revised statement showing the participation of masters and students of schools and colleges in the Bengal Presidency in political agitation* (printed), 1914;
 - iii) *List of present teachers and students of schools and colleges in the Bengal Presidency suspected to be concerned in the revolutionary organisation* (printed,corrected upto 31 December 1916), IB,,CID, Bengal. 1917.
69. GOI Home (Pub.)/June 1906/181-182.
 70. Telegram dated 25 April 1906 from C.S.EBA to HS, GOI: Home (Pub.)A/June 1906/162.
 71. Andrew Fraser, *Government and politics in Bengal*, p.15.Fraser joined the ICS in 1869 and worked mostly in the Central Provinces. He was later Chairman of the 1902-03 Police Commission and was Lt. Governor of Bengal from 1903-1908.
 72. Sec 11 of the Police Act of 1861 empowers magistrates to appoint Special Police Officers from amongst the residents of an area where unlawful assembly or riot or disturbances of the peace had taken place or were apprehended. The object is to utilise the services of such persons in assisting the police and that is why under sec.17 Special Police Officers are vested with the powers,duties,privileges and protection as are enjoyed by regular police officers.
 73. Telegram dated 19 Nov. 1905 from Mazumdar and Chaudhury, members of the Bengal Council, to Viceroy: GOI Home(Pub.) A/June 1906/170.
 74. *ibid.*, Progs. 175.
 75. Report of S.I.Hashim of Dacca Kotwali to N.A.Reily,S.P.,Dacca para 6: *Report on samitis in the Dacca Div.*, 1908,p.3.
 76. *ibid.*, pp.1-2, Allen's report dated 21 oct.1907.
 77. *ibid.*,pp.35f:report of H.L.Salkeld,O.S.D.,Dacca (who succeeded Allen when the latter proceeded on leave on grounds of health), dated 10 Dec.1908.
 78. *ibid.*,para 2. We have observed earlier in this Ch.(Table 8.3)that the actual involvement of the low-caste Hindus in political crimes was not very substantial.
 79. *ibid.*,p.72, note of Nathan dated 14 Dec. 1908.
 80. *ibid.*,p.75.
 81. This Act was amended in 1911 (Act X/1911) with more rigorous provisions for 'the prevention of public meetings likely to promote sedition or to cause a disturbance of public tranquility'.
 82. Sec.16 of Act XVI of 1908. It shows how flexible the connotation of 'law and order', and 'public peace' could be. This section was invoked in January 1909 to ban the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, Swadesh Banahab Samiti (Bakarganj), Brati Samiti (Faridpur), Suhrid Samiti (Mymensingh) and Sadhana Samaj (Mymensingh).
 83. Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act,1908 and the Indian Press Act, 1910,the latter to demand 'security for the proper working of the press' and also its forfeiture, confiscation and proscription of an issue and confiscation of the press itself.

84. The Whipping Act (Act IV), 1909.
85. The Explosive Substances Act, 1908.
86. Note dated 21.2.1916 by H.Wheeler, H.S./GOI: Home(Poll.)A/May, 1917/172, p.3.
87. GOI Home (Police)/February 1909/18-19.
88. GOI Home (Police)A/September 1909/37-38.
89. GOI Home (Police)A/May 1914/117-121.
90. GOI Home (Police)A/December 1912/101-102
91. GOI Home (Police)A/January 1912/145-46.
92. GOI Home (Police)A/December 1907/88-89 and Home (Police)A/February 1914/149-160.
93. GOI Home (Police)A/July 1912/30 Deposit.
94. Home (Poll.)B/August 1908/72-76. This newspaper was later subjected to severe repression during 1909.
95. Home (Poll.)A/April 1910/59-62. On the other hand GOI ordered release of 9 persons who had earlier been deported: Home (Poll.)A/March 1910/33-40. Also see Home (Poll.)A/July 1911/48-50.
96. Home (Poll.)A/May 1913/72-75.
97. Both these factors are quite evident if one goes through GOI Home (Poll.)A/ Nov.1914/39-48; Poll.A/May 1916/172 and (Poll.) A/Aug 1917/225-232, especially the GOI notings.
98. Poll.A/May 1916/172, especially pp.6ff, of the GOI notings.
99. Nixon, op.cit.,p.35.
100. GOB Confdl. D.O.No.3776-P dt. 14.12.1909; Police A/January 1910/181.
101. Home (Poll.)A/May 1911/15-16; GOB Secret letter No.1372-p dt. 6.2.1914 to GOI: Home (Poll.)A/Nov.1914/39.
102. Notes dated 4.2.1916 by C.R.Cleveland (Director of Criminal Intelligence/GOI) and dt. 21.2.1916 by H.Wheeler (H.S.,GOI) in Home (Poll.)A/May 1916/172.
103. *ibid.*, note dt.26.2.1916 by R.H.Craddock (Home Member of GG's Council).
104. EB&A Confdl.No.935TC. Dt. 21.2.1906 to GOI: *ibid.*, Progs.177.
105. *ibid.*, para 8.
106. H.Lemisurrier, Dacca Commr. No.132-S dt. 20.4.1908 to Chief Secy.,EB&A Govt: Home (Pub.)/January 1910/12.
107. Chief Secretary, GOB Confdl.No.2854-P dt.15.8.1908 to GOI: GOI Home (Police)A/January 1910/6. 108.*ibid.*
109. Home (Pub.)A/April 1907/207-210.
110. Handwritten note dt.18.6.1912 by H.Wheeler, HS/GOI:Home(Police)/July 1912/30/Deposit(Confdl.)

9 Conclusions

Viewing crime as an ingredient of social history, the first part of this study has dealt with the social evolution of crime in the Bengal countryside. Since the basic objective of our study is to provide an analysis of historical trends rather than a theory of criminal behaviour, we have deliberately avoided any deep foray into issues such as the sociology of crime or the politics or economics of law. Nor have we sought to look at crime and criminals largely as a discourse in 'history from below'. Though we have basically presented the crime data from official sources, attempts have been made at places to relate these to other sources and experiences as well.

What, then, have been the major findings of our quantitative study of crime in rural Bengal at the macro level? We may begin by relating some of these findings to an angry outburst by Denzil Ibbetson, Home Member of the Viceroy's Council: "Bengal as a whole is the most criminal province in India."¹ Our study has demonstrated the superficiality of such a pronouncement. Thus it has been found that during 1872-1912 Bengal had the lowest per capita total crime (TC per unit of population) when compared with the other provinces of British India even though Bengal was admittedly the most under-policed of the provinces. Secondly, the average rate of growth in total crime (TC per unit of population) during 1872-1901 was 1% per annum, which was only marginally higher than the corresponding growth rate of Bengal population (0.8%). Thirdly, there was no increase in property offences per unit of population during 1872-1901. There was, however, a sharp rise in such crimes only after 1905 due, mainly, to swadeshi dacoities of the post-partition period, rising prices of essential commodities and

diversion of police resources away from professional criminals and towards handling of political activists because of the compulsions of the colonial administration. Fourthly, apart from such long-term trends in the total volume of crime and property offences, there was a sharp decline in violent crimes during 1872-1912, thereby further exposing the hollowness of the Ibbetsonian dictum. Even the six major categories of crime—rioting, murder, dacoity, robbery, burglary and theft as a group (RiMDRBT) registered a 4% drop per 100,000 population between 1872 and 1912 despite a 23.5% population growth.

Arising out of the above crime trends, two important and interlinked issues merit special attention. The first is the conventional hypothesis of a positive relationship between industrialisation-urbanisation and growth in criminality. A marked increase in crime is presumed to follow industrialisation and this poses a dilemma not for the developing nations alone. Thus there is a global concern expressed on this score through the UN Congress on Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders.² How is it, then, that during this period of rapid industrial growth, Bengal witnessed virtually no increase in its per capita crime rate either in terms of TC or property offences or violent crimes? One possible explanation could be that the colonial criminal administration had been considerably professionalized, strengthened and consolidated during the post-Mutiny period and hence the combined impact of the police, the magistracy and the law courts succeeded in stemming the tide of criminality. This has generally been the refrain of the British colonial administrators from time to time. But recent empirical studies have shown that these control factors may play a decisive short-term role but do not, by themselves, account for the long-term crime trends. Thus Ted Gurr's study of crime in the four metropolitan cities of London, Stockholm, Sydney and Calcutta and Baldev Nayar's quantitative analysis of the fairly longterm crime trends in India (1957-1970) have come to an identical conclusion: a long-term decline in the incidence of crime is a consequence of the expansion of economic and political capabilities rather than of the restraining impact of the law, the police, the courts or the prisons.³

The British colonial administration had undoubtedly strengthened its administrative (and hence political) structure in Bengal and the rest of India during this period. Its economic capabilities — economic exploitation of its colony notwithstanding — were also expanding in diverse fields. Thus, the new job opportunities in road and railway construction, in the burgeoning mills, factories, mines and plantations

could arguably provide outlets for earning legitimate livelihoods for at least some of those who were earlier swelling the ranks of the criminal fraternity in Bengal. This contention is also supported by a quantitative survey of criminal behaviour in twentieth century Japan which shows an inverse relationship between the levels of crime and the scope of employment in the labour market.⁴

Do we then take it that the interlinked processes of industrialisation, urbanisation and migration had no impact on the Bengal crime scene? At the all-Bengal level, yes; but at the district level (concerning the four industrial districts of Burdwan, Hooghly, Howrah and 24-Parganas) no clear answer is possible because the empirical data give mixed signals — a significant rise in TC per unit of population in some areas (Burdwan and Howrah) coincides with a fall in some others (Hooghly and 24-Parganas). Property offences (DRBT) and violent crimes (RtMDRBT) per unit of population also behave in a similarly erratic manner. Simultaneously, the generalised statements in official records regarding criminal involvement of 'industrial workers', 'migrants', 'upcountrymen', 'exogenous wandering gangs' and so on give rise to a host of definitional problems. The position is further compounded by the lack of specific details like thana-level crime figures, identity of suspected/convicted criminals of the industrial pockets etc. Hence the linkage between industrialisation-immigration and crime in such areas has remained at the level of inference rather than that of substantiated fact.

The second issue which would call for some attention is the nexus between trends in property offences, violent crimes and industrialisation. In this regard our findings about Bengal crime trends have a fairly close parallel to a comparative study on some crime categories in Germany and France during the early phase of their industrialisation. In both these countries fluctuations in assault rates were observed to be negatively related to cycles of theft during the early phase of industrialisation, i.e., during the forties and fifties of the nineteenth century.⁵ But this relationship became weaker in these two countries from the 1870s onwards as the 'novelty' of industrialisation-urbanisation started wearing off and became a way of life.⁶ Gatrell's study of crime in Victorian and Edwardian England has also shown a steady decline in the real incidence of theft and violence.⁷ Hence the Bengal experience need not be deemed to be a unique one. It only shows, in common with the experience of certain other countries, that many of the present-day assumptions about the positive relationship between crime and the

criminogenic variables usually associated with economic, urban and demographic growth need not be considered to be of universal validity.

Nevertheless, the process of industrialisation and modernisation in the Bengal economy did affect the composition of the aggregate level of crime. Thus, (a) as river traffic gave way to more modern means of transport, there was a decline in river crime — a social menace which infested the Bengal waterways for centuries; (b) the growth of railway communication, on the other hand, gave rise to new forms of crime such as specialised theft and robbery committed in running trains which required considerable expertise compared to the more traditional forms of crime like river dacoity; (c) the early twentieth century also saw the emergence of a wide variety of sophisticated contraventions of the law known as 'white-collar crime' and revolutionary/political crime.

Unlike the uncertain linkage between crime and industrialisation in Bengal during our period, the nexus between crime and scarcity has been found to be clear. A special feature of the time trend of TC at once catches the eye: three distinct peaks in crime in 1866, 1875 and 1897, each period marked by famine, dearth and spiralling prices of foodgrains. The transparent relationship between food crisis and the magnitude of crime supports the hypothesis that there is a causal connection between hunger and the level of crime. Our analysis of data relating to property offences in particular and price of common rice (the staple food of a Bengali or Oriya household) for the famine-affected Orissa and Bengal districts of Balasore, Cuttack, Puri, Midnapore, Bankura and to a lesser extent Rajshahi during the 1863-67 period unmistakably reveals this interconnection. A separate case study of this issue in Midnapore district and covering four decades (1864-1904) has further reinforced the correlation between rice price (RP), total crime (TC) and property crimes (DRBT).

Only a few scholars so far have quantitatively documented this phenomenon for other parts of India but they have generally tended to concentrate on dacoity and robbery rather than the total quantum of crime and property offences as a whole (i.e. DRBT). This limitation may have been largely due to the absence of any readily usable time series on these aspects of crime for those regions. Thus according to Harvey, as a sequel to the famine of 1868 and 1869 in the North-Western Provinces, dacoities went up in these two years by 175% and 214% and robbery by 158% and 185% as compared to the same figures of 1867.⁸ One of the conclusions of David Arnold's study of dacoity in the Madras Presidency during

1860-1940 is that drought, dearth and high prices constituted "the most readily identifiable factor in the incidence of dacoity."⁹ It is difficult, however, to agree with Arnold that "Because of the numbers involved, dacoity was likely to be more expressive of minority grievances than individual acts of robbery". Such a distinction is merely semantic because robbery becomes dacoity when the number of participants involved increases from four to five or more. The basic legal ingredients of robbery and dacoity are the same except for the number — the minimum and maximum numbers for an offence of robbery are two and four respectively whereas these are five and more than five in the case of a dacoity. Hence 'individual acts of robbery' as alluded to by Arnold is really a misnomer.

Our study of the impact of dearth, scarcity and high prices of foodgrains on crime has clearly shown that during such times (a) the volume of total crimes had gone up considerably and (b) property offences as a group had also registered a considerable rise. Which were the major forms of crime during such periods of stress and which social groups were mainly responsible for such acts? The official accounts refer mostly to two types of crime—*dhan*-looting (i.e., plunder of paddy) and theft of foodgrains and vegetables. In terms of the law, *dhan*-looting could be either robbery or dacoity, depending on the number of participants. In regard to such cases of 1866, the District superintendent of Police, Midnapore stated that all the dacoities in his district related to plunder of grain and that crime in certain areas of this district (e.g. in Jungal Mahal) was attributable to want.¹⁰ The picture was similar in respect of the other two affected districts of Bankura and 24-Parganas. The 1896-97 scarcity period too had the same impact both on the overall crime figures as also on specific types of property offences.

In the absence of any relevant data on income distribution and other related economic attributes of the participants in crimes of the above varieties during the years in question, it would be difficult to pinpoint the most vulnerable social groups to whom criminal acts might have become an alternative to death by starvation. There is some evidence, however, to suggest that at least two groups have generally been the first victims of dearth in our geographical region. Firstly, numerous official accounts have referred to some tribal groups like the Lodhas and Bhumijis who used to resort to plunder in times of scarcity. Originally inhabitants of the jungle tracts of Midnapore and Bankura districts, they usually worked as the paiks or militiamen of the zamindars till they were

disbanded in course of Cornwallis' criminal administration reforms. In time they were also denied free access to forest produce, a right which they had enjoyed for centuries. Severe economic displacement and deprivation of even the primitive age-old modes of sustenance created intense bitterness and alienation among these people which led to a series of uprising by them during 1778-99. It is not surprising that this tradition of militancy coupled with dwindling forest resources prompted these turbulent people to make occasional forays into the inhabited plains, plundering villages and looting grain to sustain themselves in times of acute scarcity.

The other poverty group to whom dearth posed the threat of starvation comprised of petty village artisans, petty farmers and agricultural labourers. The latter (i.e. agricultural labourers) have always been one of the weakest segments of the rural society and in A.K.Sen's study of the Bengal famine of 1943 they are shown to be amongst the worst sufferers.¹¹ The petty farmers and artisans would be in a marginally better position to start with but would be reduced to stark poverty when want compelled them to sell off their meagre assets or when the demand for their work dwindled to nothing.

There is now an impressive body of research by western scholars on the impact of famine and dearth in 16th and 17th century England and 18th century France.¹² A recurrent theme in this research is the fairly widespread plunder of grains and food riots as forms of rural protest in times of acute scarcity. What has been the experience of Bengal in this regard? In the calamitous famine of 1770 A.D. (Bengali calendar year 1176) known in Bengal as the dreaded '*Chhiattarer Mannantar*' - i.e. the famine of 1176 - ten million people perished in Bengal alone.¹³ The nineteenth century saw a succession of famines in 1866, 1873-74 and 1896-97. Then came the devastating Bengal famine of 1943, wiping out another nearly three million lives.¹⁴ We have already alluded to instances of grain looting in Bengal in some areas of Midnapore, Bankura and 24-Parganas. But the Bengal case appears to be only a weak reflection of the pattern of rural protest against dearth and iniquitous distribution of food that has been documented in the European studies referred to earlier. We have seen that the available data for Bengal do not comprise a pattern of widespread grain looting or systematic attacks on known hoarders of food. What is significant here is not that the periodic occurrence of dearth in Bengal brought forth occasional outbursts of plunder of food but that it led to so few of them, considering the vast

areas affected and the very large number of people who perished in silence.

It may not be out of place here to speculate on this somewhat unexpected phenomenon of a low level of violent actions by the rural poor. The neutralising force of religion – stoic resignation in the face of adversity, binding them down to their *karmafal*¹⁵ for their misfortunes – may be presumed to have acted as a depressant against defiance and militancy. Accounting for the virtual absence of violence, grain-looting and attack on stocks of foodgrains, Paul Greenough's study of the Bengal famine of 1943-44 has also brought out an extraordinary failure of will or a powerful religious inhibition – 'fatalism', 'resignation', 'karma' as possible explanations offered by quite a few contemporaneous observers. "Fatalism", the "uncomplaining surrender to death by starving victims, is in fact," according to Greenough, "the most obvious piece of evidence we have for an active (sic) Bengali adaptation to the famine."¹⁶

Another contributory factor may have been the low vitality of a famine stricken population, aggravated by the enervating climate of Bengal. This aspect has been very aptly depicted in a short story by an eminent Bengali novelist, written against the backdrop of the 1943 Bengal famine : despite the exhortations of a militant dacoit to resume dacoity for physical sustenance, his erstwhile associates kept on procrastinating till, exhausted by continued malnutrition and starvation, they had neither the physical stamina nor the will to embark on plunder.¹⁷ In the light of the information available so far relating to the famines of 1866 onwards and including the 1943-44 famine in Bengal, we find it difficult to subscribe to the views of James Scott that "the onset of hunger in most societies ... leads not to listlessness but rather to rage" or that "the notion current among social scientists that really hungry people do not rebel because they lack the energy" is a 'naive' one.¹⁸ At least our limited study in the Bengal context does not support Scott's assertions.

There must have been other deterrents too against any effort at looting grains from the grain-merchants and other hoarders. The latter were also the persons who operated as creditors in time of crises and hence the poor could not muster enough courage to plunder them, more so perhaps when the big stocks were usually located in busy market-places where protective arrangements could be well-organised. On the administrative front also, despite some gestures to the famished in the form of famine relief centres, a strong lobby persisted within the administration which adopted a totally mechanistic and one-dimensional

view of grainlooting by the starving poor. Thus the District Judge of Midnapore stated that there was "no such grievous distress (in 1866) as to palliate the offence" of grain-plunder and he wanted these offenders to be treated at par with other criminals.¹⁹ Likewise, Montessoro, the Commissioner of Burdwan Division called for exemplary punishments irrespective of whether a crime was due to hunger or otherwise. The Bengal Government followed suit and proceeded to apply the provisions of the Whipping Act (Act VI/1864) to the famine and crime affected areas of Midnapore district.²⁰ Howsoever inhuman and insensitive such attitudes and actions of the colonial masters may appear to be, it would be idle to deny that such draconian administrative measures transmitted strong warning signals to the surviving poor.

The geophysical features of a given region including its terrain are also quite relevant for an understanding of both crime and criminals. Thus the profusion of navigable waterways in Bengal accounted for a special variety of crime, namely, river-dacoity. The river-borne trade of Bengal attracted a large inflow of immigrant boatmen (Mallahs) from UP and Bihar, and with them came the flotsam and jetsam of criminal elements from these two regions. The worst affected areas were naturally the riverine eastern and southern Bengal districts. Another influence of ecology has been seen in the peculiar regional concentration of murder in Bakarganj and Mymensingh districts. We observed in this context that this well-marked criminal proclivity is believed to have been the result of their geophysical environment and the unusual pattern of habitation at the village level found in these districts.

The criminal underworld of Bengal could be broadly divided into two groups according to their geographical origin. It has been observed that many of the local Bengali criminal groups (e.g. Bhumij, Lodha, Bagdi, Tuntia Musalman, Sandar etc.) drifted towards criminality after they were deprived of their earlier traditional means of livelihood. Nevertheless, none of these local subgroups came to be notified as 'criminal tribes' during the period of our study. The influx of trans-Bengal criminals increased with the opening of railways and the growing industrial and road construction activities. Though quite often resorting to the same type of crime or operating within the same district, the indigenous and exogenous groups or even their respective sub-groups did not probably intermingle, collaborate or clash with each other. Their guiding professional code must have been to 'live and let live', a motto of peaceful co-existence beneficial to both.

Our study has established that the Bengal jails were as much filled by upper castes as by lower caste people, among Hindus and Muslims alike. Though there was no dearth of Bengal criminals who came from certain social sub-groups (e.g. Lodha, Bhumij, Bediya and Sandar), we cannot say that Bengal criminals in general took to crime as a hereditary profession. Thus our study has not confirmed any hereditary criminal typology even among the low caste people, an assumption which almost amounted to an obsession with the colonial administrators.

A closer analysis suggests that the criminal linkage observed within some of the low-caste social sub-groups was not primarily due to the hereditary factor but the circumscribed milieu within which they were forced to live and survive, largely because of the rigidly structured caste system. This applied as much to low-caste Hindus as to their Muslim counterparts like the Sandars. Criminality in such circumstances should be viewed more as a by-product of the law of association rather than the biological accident of heredity. For many of them there was an undeniable hiatus between legitimate aspirations and socially structured avenues for realising such aspirations. Thus by acquiring the skills and proficiency of a *lathial*, such a person was not only conforming to a socially accepted masculine role but was also satisfying his psychological need for self-fulfilment. To most of them this was perhaps the only path to upward social mobility besides being a mode of subsistence within their narrow social confines. In this context the observations of the Bengal Dacoity Commissioner are quite pertinent: "In every other country of the world when a boy in a family is of an adventurous spirit and considers himself above the plough or the desk, that boy is enlisted in the Army or the Navy where his sanguine temperament finds full play in the idle life of a soldier or the roving life of a sailor. But the peasantry in Bengal have no such resources. A cultivator's son must be a *chasah* or he must take to the idle life of a *budmash* or a vagabond." If he possessed the personal advantage of height and figure, he hired himself out as a *lathial* or a bravado whose only qualification was to bully ryots to pay their rents, to carry their cattle or to fight in petty affrays. This the Dacoity Commissioner believed to be one of the reasons why there were so many bad characters in every village, ready on every opportunity to commit dacoity.²¹

In their mercenary role as hired *lathials* certain low-caste groups were fully exploited by the wily landholders and in course of time this developed into a mutually supportive role.²² From this situation their

eventual forays into the arena of criminality was not a big leap. It is more difficult to conjecture about the factors behind the criminality of the higher castes. Economic depression and the resultant fall from social hierarchy or group association could have played a part. But lack of sufficient data on the types of crime committed by them or on the nature of their involvement preclude a plausible explanation about their criminal motivations.

II

Any study of public disorder is bound to face the vexing problem of definition. We have tried to deal with this in our own fashion. The second problem arises from a related consideration: from whose viewpoint is a particular event (or movement) categorised as public disorder? Is it the outcome of the official discourse or of popular perception? The very concept of public disorder - upsetting the established or existing order - is basically a product of official discourse. In our analysis of the three types of major public order issues of our period - namely, communal, industrial and political - we have sought to relate the official perceptions with other viewpoints. Additionally, but more importantly, we have attempted to project certain areas concerning those issues which have either not been brought to the fore as yet or where the analytical approach has remained one-dimensional.

Certain scholars, seeking to explore the origins of communal disorders have perhaps unwittingly interpreted the historical process in a manner which tended to ignore the fact that the virus of communalism has been sedulously nurtured at both ends of the cultural/ideological spectrum - Hindu revivalism and Muslim fundamentalism. Every communal disorder is partly a manifestation of the viral spread of these two forces and this cannot be wished away by any attempt to explain it in terms of relations of production in the industrial²³ and agrarian²⁴ sectors of the region's economy; we do not deny, however, the partial validity of such factors in the genesis of communal riots in certain situations.

An attempt has been made here for the first time to tabulate the important communal incidents and cluster them under two different periods: (a) a 14-year pre-partition period (1891- 1904) and (b) an 8-year partition period (1905-1912) in order to bring out the quantitative and

qualitative transformation of the communal problem in Bengal. To recapitulate, the pre-partition period saw only half a dozen incidents in the urban-industrial pockets which were sparked off either by cow-slaughter or by controversy over mosque sites, with the almost exclusive involvement of immigrant workers.

In contrast, most of the 250 communal incidents documented for the partition period occurred in rural areas. More than 240 occurred in the newly constituted Muslim majority province of Eastern Bengal and the participants were mostly Bengali Muslims. Only three incidents were connected with cow-slaughter and the rest, as we have seen, resulted from an admixture of Muslim fundamentalism, collusion of the administration and preverse zeal on the part of some swadeshi enthusiasts. Arson, looting, outrages against women, destruction of property including attack on places of worship were the hallmarks of the partition period communal riots, and the victims were exclusively Hindus. Our findings raise doubts about the validity of some of the assertions of Sumit Sarkar in regard to the Mymensingh riots of 1906-07.²⁵

What could be the explanations for such vastly divergent characteristics of the communal disorders of these two periods? So far as the first period is concerned, we have observed that economic and other compulsions drew a large body of migrant labour force into the industrial pockets of Hooghly, Haldia and 24-Parganas besides Calcutta. The miserable living conditions of this workforce, long separation from families tucked away in distant Bihar and UP villages, the community (mohalla/dhowra) system of billeting, difficulties in adjusting to new arduous work schedules generated a great deal of tension and restiveness. To this tension among a volatile and unstable mass were added the igniting ingredients of new ideological influences - pan-Islamism at one end and the anti-cowslaughter movement at the other. The fact that most of the participants in the communal riots of the late nineteenth century in Bengal were Hindu and Muslim migrants from districts like Ballia, Benaras, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur (all in UP), Arrah, Saran, Gaya, and Patna (all in Bihar), which had witnessed a growing intensity of communal disorders since the 1880s cannot be treated as merely coincidental. It is quite possible that these people had brought with them an ingrained communal predisposition which did not take long to surface when a conjunction of other factors supervened.

Analysing the forces at work in relation to the orgy of communal violence during the partition years, we have shown that not much

evidence exists to substantiate the administration's viewpoint - also accepted by scholars, though tangentially - that a spontaneous outburst of the Muslim peasantry against the Hindu landlords was mainly due to the latter's pressure on them to buy only swadeshi goods. Coercive methods were undoubtedly used in many instances but they could not have been confined to the Eastern Bengal region only. And, surely the peasantry in other parts of Bengal too were not free from 'agrarian grievances of long standing'. How is it, then, that only the former region (i.e. eastern Bengal districts) had experienced atrocities? Obviously the key to the answer has to be sought elsewhere, namely, in the steady growth of some fundamentalist creeds like the Feraizi movement which had a strong base in eastern Bengal, later reinforced by pan-Islamism, a trend which was patronized by the upper class Urduised Muslims spearheaded by the Nawab of Dacca.²⁶ The process of communalisation of the eastern Bengal countryside received great impetus with the formation of the new Muslim majority province of which the upper class Muslims were the greatest beneficiaries. When the administration found itself badly beleaguered by the swadeshi and anti-partition agitation, led largely by Bengali Hindus, it did not hesitate to make common cause with the Nawab of Dacca in particular and with his assistance the Muslim community generally. Such a collusive alliance prompted the administration either to underplay the inflammatory preaching by itinerant Maulavis and Mullahs and the wide circulation of some communally inciting leaflets, parwanas and notices exhorting attacks on Hindus, or to shield the preachers of such communal violence. In other words, the relatively objective, non-partisan administrative attitude of the earlier era in the handling of communal disorders had undergone a basic transformation during the partition years largely due to colonial compulsions, a trend which was to continue for the rest of British rule in India. In contrast to the pre-partition years, the communal problem came to be viewed by them no longer as a mere public order issue but as an instrument to combat the threat to the security of colonial rule. Such a fundamental change in the official perception led to the intrusion of political considerations in the handling of explosive communal issues and in the process the administration's credibility was compromised. As subsequent developments in the Indian subcontinent revealed, the formation of the Muslim League in Dacca with the active patronage of the Nawab of Dacca within three months of a Muslim elites' delegation to the Viceroy in Simla in October 1906 was not quite fortuitous.

In order to assess the grievances and forms of protests of the industrial workers in Bengal, an attempt has been made for the first time to collate all the major reported incidents of unrest between 1862 and 1912. Our findings reveal that the demographic profile of the endemic area played some part not only in triggering off unrest but also in determining the issues (specially the religion-based ones) which led to riotous outbursts. The Tala and Chitpur riots of 1897 and 1910 respectively brought to the surface the strong community-centric predispositions among the migrant Muslim workers as also the speed with which they could be mobilised from distant places and aroused to a level of frenzy. Our analysis also demonstrates that secular and economic factors far outweighed the religion-based protest actions of the workers. Barring about 18 of the latter type, all the rest (nearly 39) were based on issues like wage reductions, demand for higher wages and better working and living conditions, removal of objectionable sardars, redressal of racial discrimination and so on. This gradual eclipse of community-centric issues (such as paid holidays for religious festivals etc.) may have two possible explanations. Perhaps a sort of *modus vivendi* was worked out by the management to cater to the principal religious festivals of both the communities after its bitter experience of a succession of at least 14 disturbances during 1895 alone. The management obviously thought it prudent to introduce a system of fixed paid holidays for a couple of days in a year instead of losing many more mandays through infructuous confrontations with an emotionally charged workforce. As the Pratt Report comments on the Titagarh Jute Mill disturbances of 1895 which finally secured for the workers a paid holiday for *Idul-Fitr*: "Agents and managers have been taught a lesson, and they will be chary of refusing them in future. They cannot afford to stop the mills." Secondly, in the face of falling purchasing power due to rising prices and unfair wage reductions resorted to by the management, the workers might have felt the need for ensuring economic security through concerted group actions. This accounts for the subsequent protest actions, almost all of which centered around economic demands.

Table 7.9 in Chapter 7 and Appendix VIII highlight the variegated form and the wide spectrum of protest spontaneously devised by workers at a time when organised trade union activity was virtually unknown. The touch of modernity in these group actions - such as tool-down, go-slow, walk-out, demonstration, gherao, strike and rioting - is unmistakable even in the light of present-day trade

union practices.

At this stage we may perhaps seek to draw some inferences about the behaviour patterns of the labourers on the basis of a few case studies presented in Chapters 6 and 7. Firstly, by moving away from religion-based group actions, they displayed commendable maturity as a class. This trend was particularly noticeable since 1895, though there were exceptions like the Tala (1897) and Chitpur (1910) mosque riots which erupted out of community-centric or communal issues. Secondly, they were reasonably articulate in regard to their demands and were not moved by an irrational urge for violence. This is amply proved by the fact that out of nearly fiftyseven protests staged by them, violence erupted on only about a dozen occasions between 1862 and 1912. It is also remarkable that deliberate machine-wrecking was virtually non-existent. There were only two instances in which machineries were incidental targets of attack - in the Alliance Jute Mill at Jagatdal (July 1897 on Bakr-Id issue) and in the Bowraah Cotton Mill (1899). In this respect the Bengal labouring class may be said to have shown a greater professional commitment than the Luddites of England and France where machine-wrecking was a marked feature of industrial protest during the early phase of their industrial acclimatisation, especially during 1811-13.²⁷

Next to the textile workers in numerical strength in Bengal during our period come the coalminers. Searching for their protest formats we have been surprised at the virtual absence of recorded disturbances involving mine workers. This prompted us to undertake a comparative study of these two segments of the workforce, particularly with reference to their respective work environment, management and production systems and related aspects. The similarities between the two relate to an exploitative sardari system of recruitment and supervision, and the oppressive living and working conditions, particularly in the case of the coalminers whose task was much more arduous and hazardous compared to their counterparts in the textile mills. How is it, then, that the coalminers did not resort to the kinds of protest actions which the textile workers did? Some explanations seem plausible. The geographical isolation of the collieries might be one of the relevant factors. The miners having been tucked away in remote corners, locationally isolated from other collieries as also from the nearest centres of administrative power, their protests or demands for redressal of grievances seldom attracted public or official attention. Besides, there were some structural

peculiarities of the coalmining industry which might have worked as safety valves against the miners' resentment reaching a flash point, e.g., the closure of mines during the rainy season afforded an opportunity to the miners to return home and resume their agricultural activity; this helped to break the monotony of arduous mine work and at the same time supplement their income or at least offset the loss of pay during such absence. Moreover, in the mining industry, the native component of the owners and supervisors was also reported to be larger compared to the jute and cotton textiles which probably reduced the communication gap between the employers and the employees. Perhaps the more crucial factors underlying the relative placidity at the mining sites were the very large component of local workers (Bauris and Bagdis) and the opportunities for miners to work as a family unit (e.g., it was not uncommon for the whole family including children being employed at the same worksite).

The nature of the 'consciousness' of workers, which determined the mode or style of their collective actions, forms the central issue of a recent debate. Some scholars would prefer to call it "community consciousness", while others "class consciousness".²⁸ Thus, in the context of the protest actions by groups of Hindu and Muslim jute mill workers, Dipesh Chakrabarty has defined community consciousness as "a state of mind whereby a Muslim worker thinks of himself primarily as a Muslim, as the Hindu thinks of himself firstly as a Hindu".²⁹ He uses the term 'communal' to denote "overt Hindu-Muslim conflicts"³⁰ and views communal conflict as an articulation of community consciousness. In this light, it cannot perhaps be denied that the existence of community consciousness was inherent in the fragmented, religion-based protest actions by both Hindu and Muslim workers, more so in the case of the latter. To strengthen his argument, Chakrabarty has cited the formation of the Mahomedan Association in Bengal in 1895 - 'the first organisation of mill workers' - with the avowed object of ensuring increased recruitment of Muslims as jute mill workers, renovation of mosques etc.³¹ Though Chakrabarty would not label the Tala riot (Calcutta) of 1897 as a communal one because it was not directed against the Hindus but against the administration, he stresses its pan-Islamist and Muslim community-centered orientation which attracted Muslim mill hands and other Muslim labourers.³²

According to Ranajit Das Gupta, the term community consciousness is too narrow to encompass the social milieu of the Muslim labouring poor, though he concedes that it did fit the 'ephemeral relationship'

between the Muslim poor on the one hand and Haji Zakaria and his affluent associates on the other, who operated during the Tala (1897) and Chitpur (1910) riots in Calcutta over the mosque issue.³³ In other words, both Chakraborty and Das Gupta — the latter perhaps somewhat indirectly — admit the existence of an identifiable level of community consciousness among the labouring class in Bengal during the 1890s. Chakraborty and Das Gupta have not, however, stated quite specifically that this community consciousness with an unmistakable communal overtone was more pronounced among the migrant labour groups (both Hindu and Muslim) than among the local Bengali workers. However, if later developments are any guide to an understanding of the past, one would perhaps discover that the communal riots in Bengal of the forties and sixties of the present century left their gory stains in some of these very pockets in and around Calcutta in which the upcountry elements figured prominently.

We have identified at least a dozen and a half religion based protest actions by the Bengal workers of our period in which a fairly strong element of community consciousness as distinct from class consciousness was manifest. But if we take a comprehensive view of all types of protest actions by industrial workers during our period, it will be obvious that most of them sprang from economic and other secular motivations. Thus the workers were not divided by community or regional interests while voicing protests against, say, reduction of wages, demanding higher wages or asking for grain compensation allowance in the context of high food prices. To that extent Das Gupta is amply justified in observing that though working class consciousness among the Bengal labourers had yet to emerge, there was indeed "a germination of class feeling - a feeling of an identity of interest as between the workers themselves and as against the employers."³⁴

A final point that remains to be answered in the context of such a debate about the two seemingly divergent categories of 'community consciousness' and 'class consciousness' is whether the existence of one would tend to negate the other. Neither Chakraborty nor Das Gupta has sought to provide an answer. We submit that these two levels of consciousness are not mutually exclusive. A study of the Kanpur textile workers has also pointed to a dichotomy in the attitudes and behaviour patterns of the labouring class: it shows that working class consciousness does not preclude other forms of consciousness including community or communal consciousness.³⁵

Turning now to political terrorism, it may be recalled that it is this genre of public disorder which brought in new imageries of crime (e.g.

political/revolutionary crimes including swadeshi dacoity) and criminals (e.g. *swadeshibabu*, *biplabi* and terrorist), and also added new dimensions in public order problems not only in Bengal but in other parts of India as well.

Our study of political violence in Bengal has focussed on three important but unexplored aspects. An attempt has been made to gauge the varying intensity of political violence. For this we have devised a rating scale by taking into account the relative gravity of specific offences comprising a single incident. With the help of this rating scale (expressed in terms of index numbers), we have attempted to provide a quantitative measure of the fluctuating intensity of political violence. The graph derived from these index numbers shows a sharp rise in violence from 1906, reaching the highest level in 1908. The next two years show a declining trend. There was a rise again in 1911, though the peak stood at a relatively low level compared to that of 1908. A downward trend was registered in 1912. Such fluctuations between 1908 and 1911 largely coincided with the initial success of certain repressive measures like large-scale arrest and detention of political activists, institution of a number of conspiracy cases and gang dacoity cases against them and introduction of a series of draconian legislation between 1907 and 1910. As a study of the post-1912 political violence is likely to show, it did not take long for the effects of the above measures to wear out and the levels of violence again kept mounting from 1914 onwards.³⁶

Political dacoity formed the major component of revolutionary crimes. Thus the second aspect of political terrorism studied by us relates to this phenomenon. On the basis of the documents seized by the police and the judicial confessions of some of the participants in these dacoities, we have been able to bring out the details of the initiation ceremonies which a member of a secret society (and hence a potential swadeshi dacoit or terrorist) had to go through, the methodology of planning, preparation and actual operation of a dacoity as also the rigid hierarchical structure under which these recruits functioned. Interestingly enough, a close parallel exists between the manner of functioning and the symbols and rituals of these *bhadralok* dacoits and their earlier counterparts, viz., the professional dacoit gangs of nineteenth century Bengal. However, three new features were introduced in the Bengal crime scene by the swadeshi 'dacoits'. Firstly, firearms were used, or at least carried, during the commission of every swadeshi dacoity. Lathi was no longer the

principal weapon of crime as was the case with the professional dacoits till then. The second feature was the participation in crimes - albeit of the swadeshi variety - by a wide cross-section of the Bengali middle class, a trend which was to persist even after the achievement of freedom from foreign rule. Thirdly, the booty of swadeshi dacoity was seldom used for private gain.

Our analysis of the socio-economic background of the people involved in political crimes shows that the 10-20 age-group contributed the bulk of the participants. This is not surprising. Terrorism, after all, is partly a product of emotionalism, and in our given context its execution called forth persons who could be totally unconcerned about their own safety and were possessed of a high level of emotional commitment to the patriotic task besides the required physical agility. And who else but these young boys could fill the bill when the call for sacrifice came? Secondly, contrary to the persistent assertion by Government that the revolutionary activities were confined to upper caste Hindus, the available statistics show this to be only partially true. Thus, about one-tenth of those convicted or killed due to their revolutionary acts were lower caste Hindus, Europeans and Eurasians, the latter's involvement being confined to arms traffic. It is worth noting here that the Sedition Committee Report, from which these statistical data have been derived, suppressed quite a few crucial facts about the participants in revolutionary crimes, presumably because these disclosures would have been inconvenient for the colonial rulers. Thus Muslims do not figure in the Committee's list of persons convicted for or killed in the commission of political crimes. In reality, however, as many as ten Muslims were convicted for participation in political crimes as could be traced from some hitherto unused records of the Bengal Intelligence Branch. Similar suppression of facts about extent of involvement of the lower caste Hindus have also come to our notice.

Of the 186 participants who were either convicted or killed in the commission of revolutionary crimes, as many as 68 were students, 16 teachers, 19 landowners (extent of landholding not known), 56 engaged in various occupations including trade and commerce and 24 others had no identifiable occupation.

We had earlier drawn attention to the pioneering role of Miss Saraladebi of Calcutta in mobilising Bengali youth. It is surprising, however, that no other woman's name finds mention in any of the detailed lists of persons (including teachers and students) connected with revolutionary activities. It is quite possible that though some women

provided support and assistance to the political activists (e.g. as couriers and messengers, shelter-givers etc.), they could manage to stay out of the limelight and thereby escape official notice. This presumption is borne out by the fact that women activists like Bina Das, Pritilata Waddadar, Kalpana Talukdar and many others figured in daring acts of political terrorism in the next couple of decades.

When we relate the phenomenon of political terrorism in Bengal of 1906-1912 with certain left extremist movements in India between the 1940s and 1970s, we come across some interesting features. Sumit Sarkar has rightly pointed out that one of the crucial weaknesses of the political movement of this period (1905-1908) was the failure of the leaders to involve the peasant masses in this upsurge; he ascribes this failure to the class character of the participants with their 'inherited assumptions and attitudes'. As a result, "Not Jacobin France ... but Risorgimento Italy offers the best European parallel to Bengal extremism."³⁷

The above failure to get through to the peasantry was largely avoided during the two left extremist movements between the 1940s and '50s in Telengana (Andhra Pradesh) and in certain parts of Bengal (the latter known as the Tebhaga movement). Both these movements displayed streaks of terrorism along with a high level of peasant participation and militancy.³⁸ The other left extremist movement of recent years, from 1967 to about 1972 to be precise, and known as the Naxalite movement, professed to follow the tenets of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and sought to capture political power through an armed peasant struggle. In the initial phase of this movement in the Naxalbari region of Darjeeling district of West Bengal (1967-68), there was an appreciable involvement of the peasantry but its subsequent development in Calcutta and in certain other districts of West Bengal (e.g. in Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia, 24-Parganas, Nadia, Birbhum, West Dinajpore, Jalpaiguri) during 1969-72 was characterised by the isolation of the activists from the peasant masses. This latter trend was clear from about the middle of 1970, by which time the movement had suffered a serious setback in the rural areas of Bengal and had adopted a programme of 'annihilation of class enemies', which eventually turned out to be cold-blooded and brutal murders of policemen, CPI(M), workers and only a handful of medium landholders (jotedars).³⁹

In terms of the participants, the Bengal terrorists of 1906-1912 and the Bengal Naxalites of 1969-72 had much in common: the activists in

both upheavals were largely drawn from the college and school students belonging to the bhadralok class. In one respect perhaps the former movement scored over the latter in that it did not consciously allow its organisational purity to be diluted by the induction of lumpen, antisocial or criminal elements within its fold. This was not so during the Naxalite upsurge. Thus, though the initial Naxalbari phase of the struggle (1967-68) was largely free from such 'contamination', it was not entirely devoid of such elements.⁴⁰ This incipient trend assumed considerable prominence with the launching of the 'annihilation' programme during the second half of 1970 when the worth of an action squad began to be judged by the number of annihilations scored by it and the extent of brutality with which such murders could be carried out.⁴¹ And who but some hardened criminals and lumpens could excel in such acts? Naturally enough the ideologically motivated youths felt compelled to induct a sizeable number of such elements to keep up the 'revolutionary' image of their respective action squads. Thereafter it did not take long for Gresham's Law to come into operation - the propensity of the baser elements to come to the fore. This process was given a boost by Charu Majumdar's ('Chairman' of the Naxalites of this period) dictum that one who had not dipped his hands in the blood of the class enemy was not fit to be treated as a communist.⁴²

In organisational matters and in operational techniques, however, one can point to a number of similarities between these two groups of Bengal extremists of 1906-1912 and 1967-1972 periods. Organisationally both were conspiratorial, believing in utmost secrecy, unquestioned obedience to the dictates of the party/unit chiefs. Serious infractions were met with death penalty. However, the *Gita* and the *Chandi* of the former group were replaced by the pocket-book of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, though the latter did not make much difference ultimately in the quality of participants. One can also find a striking similarity in the systems of recruitment and initiation ceremonies, sans the puja rituals of the former group. As a matter of operational tactic, both groups believed in and practised individual killing and hit-and-run methods.

On the ideological plane, the Bengal terrorists of the earlier period were poles apart from the Naxalites. The sole motivating factor for the former was to strike terror among the foreign rulers so that they were compelled to leave India. To the Naxalites, the terror tactics through annihilation was a means for creating 'liberated zones' in the countryside

for the eventual capture of political power. In practice, however, it turned out to be isolated acts of individual terrorism of the worst variety which not only alienated them from the masses but was also severely criticised by its erstwhile mentor (the Communist Party of China) as a caricature of the 'Thoughts of Mao Tse-Tung', namely, to encircle the city by the countryside.

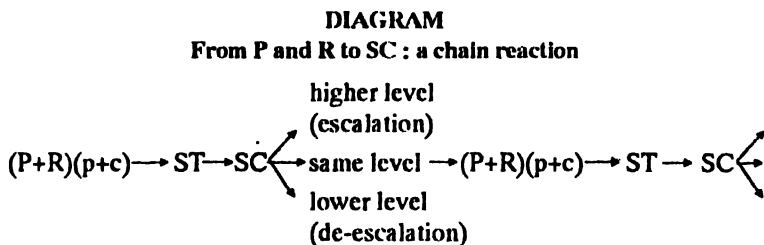
The ideologies of both the groups lacked in economic content. The Bengal terrorists of the earlier period had no pretence of attempting any transformation of the social structure including the agrarian relations or the class relationship. As for Naxalites, despite their avowed programme of carrying out some 'major tasks' like confiscation of all land belonging to the landlords and its redistribution among the landless and poor peasants *after* the creation of the 'people's democratic state',⁴³ it did not take long for the CPI(ML) leadership to severely castigate any manifestation of 'economism' during their guerilla struggle.⁴⁴ And, as mentioned earlier, the guerilla struggle soon turned out to be an euphemism for individual killings by terrorist bands loosely known as action squads.

One wonders whether terrorism has an inexorable logic of its own whereby its onetime sponsors and votaries turn against it after some time when its realities are revealed in all their fury and ugliness. It happened with the brothers Aurobindo and Barin Ghosh, Bhupendranath Dutta and a host of others of the first terrorist era. A similar process started in the Naxalite fold, especially after its rejection of the 'mass line' and adoption of the iconoclastic programmes of idol – smashing and attack on educational institutions and culminating in the anarchic killings. The exit of Naxalite stalwarts like Nagi Reddy, Asit Sen (who presided over the public rally of April 1969 in Calcutta declaring the birth of CPIML on 22 April), Parimal Dasgupta, Promode Sengupta and Sushital Roychoudhury (one of the three top ideologues of Naxalism) considerably weakened the political base of the party. Such desertions left Charu Majumdar with unfettered power which led to the eventual decimation and destruction of whatever revolutionary potential the Naxalite movement may have had.

In this as also in the earlier chapters dealing with crime and public order, we took note of the responses and reactions of the administration. It is perhaps necessary now to take a look at them in their totality and see whether a common thread runs throughout. In this context we reiterate two basic propositions; firstly, that tension and conflict are

inherent in every society; and secondly, that the phenomena of crime and public disorder, in a sense, are both historically mechanisms of adjustment through social conflict - for they represent the interplay of social forces including their interface with the controlling institutions, administrative or any other.

Social tension (ST) depends on both objective and subjective conditions, economic as well as non-economic. But the intensity level of ST is primarily influenced by two factors: (i) the *perception* of threat (P) by an individual or a group in regard to its social and/or economic vulnerability, and (ii) the manner in which it *responds* (R) to the perceived threat. In every situation of social conflict (SC), the level of such conflict is largely determined by the P and R factors through their impact on ST. ST and the resultant SC, again, will affect the P and R factors of the participants (p) and controllers (c) in varying degrees. There is, thus, a circularity in the whole process :



P = Perception of threat.

R = Response to threat.

p = participants.

c = controllers.

ST = Social Tension.

SC = Social Conflict.

We are concerned here with two manifestations of social conflict, namely, crime and public disorder. In each of these two spheres P and R factors have played an important part. Thus the historical process of economic displacement coupled with social alienation and stigmatisation faced by many of the tribal or semi-tribal (e.g. Lodha, Bhumij) and other low caste/class people (e.g. Bagdi, Bediya, Gwala etc.) inevitably created a sense of insecurity in them. The perception of threat and the response to it, of course, would have varied between one social sub-group and another just as it would have differed even within the same sub-group. Socio-economic changes must have altered their threat perception at a later stage. Thus, their ranks in the criminal fraternity started dwindling towards the late nineteenth century, by which time job opportunities for them increased and they also had time to realise that the path of criminality was not the only paying proposition in terms of associated risks and benefits. This feature was perhaps more pronounced since the beginning of the twentieth century by which time the caste stratifications also started becoming less rigid in Bengal. The swadeshi movement may be said to have hastened this process somewhat or else a Sudra or a Kayastha (e.g. Pulin Das of Dacca, Indra Nandi of Calcutta and others) performing puja and giving *diksha* (semi-religious rites during initiation to a secret society) to Brahmin, Kayastha and Sudra boys alike would have been considered sacrilegious a couple of decades earlier.

We have also witnessed the accentuated criminality in the behaviour patterns of some adversely affected social groups in times of famine and acute food scarcity when their very physical survival was at stake. As the threat receded, there was a corresponding de-escalation in the level of criminality.

Our model regarding the circularity in the process of social tension and conflict will perhaps aid the explanation of the respective reactions of the two sets of people involved in public disorder situations - the participants (p) and the controllers(c), i.e. the administration. Thus a heightened perception of threat on the part of one group normally led to a heightened level of its response; this, in turn, was expected to generate a higher level of threat to the other group and its consequent response was also likely to be higher than before. This would amount to an escalation in the levels of ST and SC. Such a triggering mechanism may be set in motion either by the participants or by the controllers but the outcome, an upward spiralling in SC or its converse (i.e. de-escalation),

is likewise largely dependent on the perception and response pattern of either of the two groups.

Viewed in the light of the above model, the government's handling of the problem of crime, even of crimes by organised gangs of dacoits before the Bengal partition, generally remained confined to a routine anti-crime or law and order approach. Since there was no threat to the security of the ruling group, its responses also were at a low key. Even in the case of the indigo cultivators or the Pabna ryots, the administration did not perceive any challenge to its security; hence the latter (i.e. the controllers) acted more as umpires between two contending parties. Nor did the peasant participants in either of these two episodes perceive any threat from the controllers. On the contrary, the administration was looked upon by the peasants during those movements as the dispenser of justice. So there was not only no escalation but rather a de-escalation in the conflict situation.

The scenario was not quite the same in the sphere of either communal or industrial disorders. The administrative handling of these two relatively novel situations left a sense of injustice and grievance against the controllers (magistracy-police, and/or European managers). The controllers also perceived a threat to their commercial and colonial interests from the behaviour patterns of these two sets of participants. Hence there was, by and large, a higher level of $p(P+R)$ as well as $c(P+R)$ whereby the ST and SC factors were reinforced instead of getting defused.

The onset of the political agitation in 1905 brought about a qualitative change in the administration's perception of threat posed by the agitators and this, in turn, brought about an unmistakable change in its responses, not only towards the political agitators but also in regard to industrial and communal disorders. We have seen that even during the 1890s, when disorders in the shape of industrial workers' protests had reached significant levels of militancy and frequency, administrative strictures were not directed against the workers alone. In fact, almost till the infusion of swadeshi influence among the industrial workers to a certain extent during 1905-06, the Civil Servants were not hesitant in chastising the 'tactless' and 'overbearing' European managers. But there was a distinct hardening in their attitude towards the workers' recalcitrance after the political influence was noticed.

Similarly, the administrative responses to communal disorder situations were markedly different during the pre-partition and partition periods. During the first period the locale of the outbursts was urban, in the immediate neighbourhood of British commercial and industrial establishments besides being in uncomfortably close proximity to the seat of the colonial power in British India, namely, Calcutta. Thanks to the added influence of the European-dominated Indian Jute Mills Association, the threat to the ruling group's interests was blown up on almost every occasion. Hence no attempt was spared by the administration, including repeated mobilisation of the military and paramilitary forces, to suppress these communal disorders in a swift and ruthless manner.

Such administrative agility was not only marked by its absence during the partition period communal riots but there was a plain and simple connivance at the organisers of these communal disorders. It is not our contention that such an administrative attitude was due to any inherent love of the Muslims or hatred against the Hindus. Their reaction was guided largely by the requirements of the colonial interest which, in turn, was conditioned by its perception of the foci of threat.⁴⁵ Numerous official documents reflected the Government's conviction that the political agitation was directed towards the removal of foreign rule and that this upsurge was being spearheaded by the Bengali Hindus. In a situation like this, the principle of *divide et impere* was too tempting a tool to be left unexploited. The short-sightedness of the leaders of political agitation and the self-seeking ambitions of Muslim elites and preachers provided the needed ammunition to the wily administration to create the malevolent communal divide.

If we look at the entire range of the administrative responses to crime and the three public order issues, a steady shift in the policing policy of the Government is evident. It was a shift away from crime prevention and control to containment of public disorder. This, in turn, necessitated greater reliance on military and para-military forces as against the civil police. Proliferation of police strength since the 1890s was largely guided by the administration's concern for the containment of public disorders rather than for prevention and control of crimes which affected the common people. Investigation of political crimes, however, stood on a different footing. But here too the emphasis was more on augmentation of the secret (political) police rather than on strengthening the village-level thana police. All these distortions in the policing policy of

the Government tended to alienate the police from the people, a legacy which was to persist for decades thereafter.

The first decade of the twentieth century may be viewed as a watershed in the crime history of Bengal although the process of transformation may well have started a decade or two earlier. Firstly, many of the low-caste people who had or would have otherwise drifted into crime found new avenues of subsistence in the emerging industrial activities. In this changing scenario crime was perhaps neither as satisfying nor as paying an occupation as it used to be earlier when the governmental machineries of crime control were relatively unorganised. An equally significant development, however, was the influx of non-local deviant elements either as part of the migratory labour force or as comparatively well-organised migrant criminal gangs as revealed by the Bramley enquiries of 1903-04. It is likely that the growing criminal activity of this motley group offset the diminution in the indigenous criminal pressure.

Secondly, with the launching of the swadeshi and anti-partition agitation in Bengal during the first decade of this century, 'swadeshi' dacoity and other forms of political crime acquired a large measure of social approbation and thus a new dimension was added to the popular perception of crime. Participants in such activities were generally from the educated middle-class (bhadralok) homes. Social banditry at this stage acquired a new meaning, a patriotic halo. Historically, a new genre of crime and criminals had now emerged in Bengal.

Finally, within a brief span of about two decades (c.1890-1910), the three major public order issues - communal, industrial and political - underwent a quantitative as well as a qualitative transformation. As later developments would indicate, this transformation had profound implications for different segments of society beyond the confines of Bengal proper: a widening Hindu-Muslim communal rift with consequent political ramifications, a growing militancy in industrial workers' protest actions culminating in trade unionism, and an uncompromising confrontation of the educated middle class with the alien rulers. Concurrently, a more acute perception of threat on the part of the rulers led to a new style of administrative functioning marked by manipulation and repression rather than by a straightforward legalistic approach to public order problems.

The Bengal partition years, thus, stand out as the 'great divide' between one era and another in more ways than one.

NOTES

1. Home (Judl.) Progs. A/May 1906/196-294: Note of Ibbetson dt. 1.8. 1903.
2. See, for instance, *Report of the 4th UN Congress on the prevention of crime and treatment of offenders, Kyoto (Japan), 1970*; *Prevention of delinquency in the context of national development*, UN publication, Geneva, 1968.
3. Ted Robert Gurr, *Rogues, rebels and reformers*, preface, p.ix; B.R.Nayar, *Violence and crime in India*, pp.47, 133.
4. Robert Evans Jr., "Changing labour markets and criminal behaviour in Japan", *Journal of Asian studies*, May 1977, vol.36(3).
5. Howard Zehr, *Crime and the development of modern society*, p.95.
6. *ibid.*, pp. 102ff, 111.
7. V.A.C.Gatrell, "The decline of theft and violence in Victorian and Edwardian England."
8. F.Harvey, *A narrative of drought and famine which prevailed in the North-West during the years 1868, 1869 and beginning of 1870, 1871*, pp.126-27.
9. David Arnold, "Dacoity and rural crime in Madras, 1860-1940", pp.140-57.
10. Statement of F.Adams, Supdt. of Police, Midnapore dt.26.1. 1867 in *Famine Commission Report, 1867*, Statement, p.cxi-ii
11. A.K.Sen, *Poverty and famines : an essay in entitlement and deprivation*, 1981, pp.70-75.
12. See, for example, R.C.Cobb, *The police and the people*, 1970; J.Walter and K.Wrightson, "Dearth and social order in early modern England". *Past and Present*, 1976, no. 71; C.S.L.Davies, "Peasant revolt in France and England: a comparison", *Agricultural history review*, vol.21; James Scott, *The moral economy of the peasant*, 1976.
13. For details, see Younghusband, *Transaction in India*, 1786, pp. 123ff; W.W.Hunter, *Annals of rural Bengal*.
14. A.K.Sen, "Famine mortality: a case study of the Bengal famine of 1943", E.J.Hobsbawm et al (eds.), *Peasants in history*, 1980, p.202.
15. *Karmafal* literally means the consequences, good or bad, of one's actions in this or previous life - a concept which runs through as a common strand in the Hindu view of life.
16. Paul R.Greenough, *Prosperity and misery in modern Bengal : the famine of 1943-1944*, 1982, pp.266-70.
17. Manik Bandopadhyay, "Chhiniye khaynee keno" (Why they did not plunder for survival), *Utarkaler galpa-sangraha*, 1972.
18. James C.Scott, *op.cit.*, p.191.
19. *Famine Commission Report, 1867*, vol.I, pp.280ff.
20. *ibid.*, paras 26-27, 29.
21. *Report of the Bengal Dacoity Commissioner for the year 1862* (J.H.Reily, dt.2 April, 1863, p.7).
22. See, for example, *Confessions of dacoit approvers*, 1857.

23. See, for example, Ranajit Das Gupta, "Material conditions".
24. See, for example, Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi movement in Bengal* and "The condition and nature of subaltern militancy" in *Subaltern Studies III*.
25. Sec Ch.6, sec.VI.
26. The development of a communal identity among the Muslim peasantry, especially in eastern Bengal, and its exploitation by the upper class Muslims (*ashrafs*) has been dealt with fully in Rafiuddin Ahmed, *op.cit*.
27. See, e.g., Rude, *The crowd in history*, Chs.5 and 15.
28. Dipesh Chakrabarty and Ranajit Das Gupta, "Some aspects of labour history of Bengal in the nineteenth century: two views", *Occasional Paper No.40*, CCSS, Calcutta, 1981.
29. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Communal riots and labour: Bengal's jute mill hands in the 1890s", *Occasional Paper No.11*, CCSS, Calcutta, 1976, p.5; see also his paper under the same title in *Past and Present*, May 1981, pp.148ff.
30. *ibid.* (We do not, however, accept this connotation of 'communal': see our Ch.6, sec.II.).
31. Chakrabarty, *Occasional Paper No.11*, p.36.
32. Chakrabarty, *Occasional Paper No.40*, pp.5-6.
33. Ranajit Das Gupta, "Material conditions", p.137.
34. Ranajit Das Gupta, "Poverty and protest: a case study of Calcutta's working class and labouring poor (1897-1900)", *The world and the working class: a labour studies anthology*, 1983, p.260. Also see his "Material conditions", p.137.
35. Chitra Joshi, "Bonds of community, ties of religion: Kanpur textile workers in the early twentieth century", *IESHR*, July-September, 1985, p.280.
36. See, for instance, the *Sedition Committee Report*, 1918.
37. Sumit Sarkar, *The swadeshi movement in Bengal*, p.514.
38. The Telengana movement has been chronicled by P.Sundarayya, *Telengana peoples' struggle and its lessons*, 1972; and R.N. Reddi, *Heroic Telengana - reminiscences and experiences*, 1979. For an account of the Tebhaga movement of Bengal, see Sunil Sen, *Agrarian struggle in Bengal, 1946-47*, 1972.
39. See, for instance, Biplab Dasgupta, *The Naxalite movement*, 1974, especially Chs. 2,3,4.
40. The principal leader of this phase of the movement, Kanu Sanyal later admitted that "In many cases, fooled by the display of revolutionary ardour in vagabonds, we made them leaders for organising armed groups": Kanu Sanyal, *Report on the peasant movement in the Terai region, 1968*, p.24.
41. For the manner in which brutality was eulogised and encouraged, see, for instance, CPI(ML)'s mouthpiece (monthly issues) *Liberation* of August 1969 to March 1970.
42. Charu Majumdar, "A few words about guerilla actions", *Liberation*, February 1970.
43. Emphasis added. This has reference to the "Programme of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)" adopted at the Party Congress in May, 1970, para 38.
44. Charu Majumdar, "Carry forward the peasant struggle", *Liberation*, November, 1969: "To attempt agrarian revolution without first smashing the state machinery is straightforward revisionism". In fact, one of the criticisms levelled against the

CPI(ML) by the Chinese Communist Party was the former's failure to evolve an appropriate economic policy during its armed struggle.

45. Interestingly enough, a research into the development of communal conflict in Delhi (1803-1930) shows that the British administrators continued to periodically shift their support from the community which posed a threat to the colonial administration-to begin with, the Hindus, then the Muslims and again the Hindus: Warren Fusfeld, "Communal conflict in Delhi, 1803-1930", *IESHR*, April-June 1982, pp. 181, 182, 195-97.

APPENDIX I

Divisions and districts of Bengal proper : area and population (1881 and 1911)

| Division/district | Area (Sq.mile) | | Population | |
|----------------------------|----------------|-------|------------|----------|
| | 1881 | 1911 | 1881 | 1911 |
| Burdwan division | 13855 | 13948 | 7393954 | 8467314 |
| Burdwan | 2697 | 2691 | 1391823 | 1538371 |
| Birbhum | 1756 | 1752 | 794428 | 935473 |
| Bankura | 2621 | 2621 | 1041752 | 1138670 |
| Midnapur | 5082 | 5186 | 2517802 | 2821201 |
| Hooghly | 1223 | 1188 | 1012768 | 1090097 |
| Howrah | 476 | 510 | 635381 | 943502 |
| Presidency division | 12029 | 17467 | 7771693 | 8549254 |
| 24-Parganas | 2097 | 4844 | 1618420 | 2434104 |
| Nadga | 3404 | 2790 | 2017847 | 1617846 |
| Murshidabad | 2144 | 2143 | 1226790 | 1372274 |
| Jessore | 2276 | 2925 | 1577249 | 1758264 |
| Khulna | 2077 | 4765 | 1079948 | 1366766 |
| Rajshahi division | 19319 | 19235 | 8444223 | 10138302 |
| Rajshahi | 2361 | 2618 | 1338638 | 1480587 |
| Dinajpur | 4118 | 3946 | 1514346 | 1687863 |
| Jalpaiguri | 2884 | 2919 | 581562 | 902660 |
| Darjeeling | 1234 | 1164 | 155179 | 265550 |
| Rangpur | 3486 | 3479 | 2097964 | 2385330 |
| Bogra | 1498 | 1359 | 734358 | 983567 |
| Pabna | 1847 | 1851 | 1311728 | 1428586 |
| Malda | 1891 | 1899 | 710448 | 1004159 |
| Dacca division | 15000 | 16244 | 8700939 | 1203764 |
| Dacca | 2797 | 2777 | 2116350 | 2960402 |
| Mymensingh | 6287 | 6249 | 3051966 | 4526422 |
| Faridpur | 2267 | 2576 | 1631734 | 2121914 |
| Bakarganj | 3749 | 4642 | 1900889 | 2428911 |
| Chittagong division | 6699 | 6635 | 3472451 | 5240661 |
| Chittagong | 2567 | 2492 | 1132341 | 1508433 |
| Tippera | 2491 | 2499 | 1519338 | 2430138 |
| Noakhali | 1641 | 1644 | 820772 | 1302090 |
| Bengal proper | 66902 | 73529 | 35783260 | 44433180 |

Note : (i) Presidency division totals exclude Calcutta

(ii) Bengal proper totals exclude Calcutta and Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Sources : COB 1881, Vol.II (Appendix B), Table I, pp.2-6;
COI 1911, Vol.V, part II (Tables), Table I, p.2.

APPENDIX II
Total cognisable crime and six major crimes
Bengal and divisions : 1864-1912

| | Total cog crime (TC) | Rioting (Rt) | Murder (M) | Dacoity (D) | Robbery (R) | Burglary (B) | Theft (T) |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1864 : | | | | | | | |
| Burdwan (B) | 5504 | NA | 66 | 70 | 43 | NA | 2804 |
| Presidency (P) | 3970 | NA | 52 | 60 | NA | NA | NA |
| Rajshahi (R) | 7727 | NA | 71 | 70 | NA | NA | NA |
| Dacca (D) | 4146 | NA | 56 | 32 | NA | NA | 1386 |
| Chittagong (C) | 3335 | NA | 32 | 25 | NA | NA | 1320 |
| Total Bengal (T) | 24682 | NA | 277 | 257 | NA | NA | NA |
| 1865 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 7279 | NA | 48 | 134 | 35 | NA | NA |
| P | 5170 | NA | 38 | 43 | 14 | NA | NA |
| R | 7616 | NA | 48 | 61 | 27 | NA | NA |
| D | 6941 | NA | 44 | 69 | 482 | NA | NA |
| C | 2846 | NA | 18 | 20 | 18 | NA | NA |
| T | 29852 | NA | 196 | 327 | 576 | NA | NA |
| 1866 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 12841 | 50 | 61 | 503 | 78 | 1700 | 5917 |
| P | 9314 | 142 | 68 | 117 | 52 | 1640 | 3655 |
| R | 8396 | 255 | 39 | 124 | 32 | 1832 | 3491 |
| D | 5318 | 110 | 70 | 20 | 69 | 739 | 1740 |
| C | 2998 | 107 | 30 | 27 | 30 | 568 | 860 |
| T | 38767 | 664 | 268 | 791 | 261 | 6479 | 15663 |

Note : NA = not available

1867 :

| | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|
| B | 9630 | 44 | 43 | 176 | 80 | NA | NA |
| P | 6457 | 180 | 57 | 52 | 58 | NA | NA |
| R | 6935 | 211 | 54 | 67 | 43 | NA | NA |
| D | 3897 | 179 | 75 | 18 | 17 | NA | NA |
| C | 2479 | 176 | 26 | 14 | 17 | NA | NA |
| T | 29398 | 790 | 255 | 327 | 215 | NA | NA |

1868 :

| | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|
| B | 8394 | 65 | 51 | 165 | 49 | 1841 | 2931 |
| P | 8362 | 162 | 49 | 45 | 39 | 2870 | 2823 |
| R | 7838 | 247 | 75 | 89 | 37 | 2596 | 3240 |
| D | 4420 | 193 | 67 | 30 | 18 | 1039 | 1550 |
| C | 2570 | 113 | 29 | 10 | 9 | 518 | 760 |
| T | 31584 | 780 | 271 | 339 | 152 | 8864 | 11304 |

| | TC | Rt | M | D | R | B | T |
|--------------|-------|------|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| 1869: | | | | | | | |
| B | 8584 | NA | 59 | 122 | 51 | NA | 3339 |
| P | 9266 | NA | 48 | 59 | 35 | NA | 3080 |
| R | 7191 | NA | 50 | 63 | 34 | NA | 2970 |
| D | 4637 | NA | 53 | 20 | 22 | NA | 1551 |
| C | 2547 | NA | 19 | 14 | 23 | NA | 833 |
| T | 32225 | NA | 229 | 278 | 165 | NA | 11772 |
| 1870: | | | | | | | |
| B | 8311 | NA | 41 | 76 | 60 | NA | 5180 |
| P | 8714 | NA | 57 | 34 | 31 | NA | 6230 |
| R | 7117 | NA | 42 | 60 | 19 | NA | 5167 |
| D | 3803 | NA | 56 | 40 | 11 | NA | 2494 |
| C | 1316 | NA | 21 | 4 | 4 | NA | 769 |
| T | 29261 | NA | 217 | 214 | 125 | NA | 19840 |
| 1871: | | | | | | | |
| B | 10019 | NA | NA | 67 | 53 | NA | NA |
| P | 11070 | NA | 47 | 40 | NA | NA | NA |
| R | 7782 | NA | NA | 39 | NA | NA | NA |
| D | 6358 | NA | NA | 54 | NA | NA | NA |
| C | 2102 | NA | 19 | 5 | NA | NA | NA |
| T | 37331 | NA | 260 | 205 | NA | NA | NA |
| 1872: | | | | | | | |
| B | 15244 | 146 | 59 | 119 | 115 | 2419 | 5747 |
| P | 16151 | 629 | 54 | 53 | 48 | 3702 | 5051 |
| R | 13820 | 875 | 48 | 87 | 105 | 2920 | 3974 |
| D | 13632 | 937 | 103 | 43 | 75 | 1245 | 3274 |
| C | 4046 | 291 | 32 | 8 | 21 | 269 | 1394 |
| T | 62893 | 2878 | 296 | 310 | 364 | 10555 | 19440 |
| 1873: | | | | | | | |
| B | 15975 | 198 | 61 | 116 | 117 | 2161 | 5989 |
| P | 15536 | 367 | 59 | 56 | 42 | 3011 | 5634 |
| R | 15655 | 617 | 69 | 113 | 117 | 3425 | 4495 |
| D | 14772 | 948 | 96 | 37 | 58 | 1456 | 4821 |
| C | 4203 | 224 | 31 | 19 | 33 | 210 | 1533 |
| T | 66141 | 2354 | 216 | 341 | 276 | 10263 | 22472 |
| 1874: | | | | | | | |
| B | 18747 | 222 | 39 | 164 | 110 | 2739 | 6819 |
| P | 17608 | 431 | 54 | 50 | 70 | 3291 | 6245 |
| R | 16429 | 313 | 54 | 135 | 90 | 4324 | 3321 |
| D | 15788 | 856 | 58 | 25 | 34 | 1515 | 5022 |
| C | 4566 | 265 | 20 | 12 | 23 | 171 | 1523 |
| T | 73138 | 2087 | 225 | 426 | 327 | 12040 | 22930 |

| | TC | Rt | M | D | R | B | T |
|---------------|-------|------|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| 1875 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 18259 | 215 | 45 | 91 | 52 | 2890 | 6362 |
| P | 18953 | 415 | 48 | 47 | 41 | 3404 | 6121 |
| R | 15797 | 417 | 55 | 85 | 93 | 3710 | 4479 |
| D | 17032 | 796 | 73 | 33 | 6 | 1765 | 5202 |
| C | 5625 | 334 | 19 | 9 | 15 | 223 | 1688 |
| T | 75666 | 2177 | 240 | 265 | 207 | 11992 | 23852 |
| 1876 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 17077 | 196 | 46 | 71 | 54 | 2340 | 5533 |
| P | 17520 | 303 | 54 | 25 | 29 | 3039 | 5510 |
| R | 15860 | 338 | 60 | 50 | 56 | 3310 | 4777 |
| D | 17213 | 796 | 89 | 20 | 24 | 1794 | 4976 |
| C | 5745 | 278 | 28 | 11 | 14 | 264 | 1785 |
| T | 73415 | 1911 | 277 | 177 | 177 | 10747 | 22581 |
| 1877 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 15500 | 264 | 40 | 38 | 39 | 2038 | 4831 |
| P | 15175 | 318 | 28 | 15 | 35 | 2254 | 5129 |
| R | 13751 | 331 | 46 | 32 | 40 | 2767 | 4182 |
| D | 15431 | 777 | 108 | 38 | 23 | 1762 | 4447 |
| C | 6050 | 256 | 22 | 15 | 7 | 413 | 2052 |
| T | 65907 | 1946 | 244 | 138 | 144 | 9234 | 20641 |
| 1878 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 15152 | 263 | 49 | 56 | 49 | 2064 | 4881 |
| P | 14965 | 299 | 50 | 19 | 28 | 2756 | 4853 |
| R | 14065 | 314 | 54 | 35 | 39 | 3012 | 4641 |
| D | 15055 | 686 | 80 | 52 | 18 | 1949 | 4482 |
| C | 6033 | 289 | 18 | 20 | 18 | 355 | 2010 |
| T | 65270 | 1851 | 251 | 182 | 152 | 10136 | 20867 |
| 1879 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 16577 | 267 | 33 | 65 | 51 | 2279 | 4874 |
| P | 16546 | 297 | 58 | 8 | 27 | 2893 | 5485 |
| R | 14039 | 265 | 43 | 33 | 46 | 2644 | 4354 |
| D | 13939 | 770 | 67 | 45 | 33 | 1693 | 4075 |
| C | 5520 | 230 | 13 | 12 | 18 | 275 | 1524 |
| T | 66621 | 1829 | 214 | 163 | 175 | 9754 | 20312 |
| 1880 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 17078 | 277 | 68 | 43 | 49 | 2205 | 4408 |
| P | 15685 | 370 | 79 | 10 | 27 | 2479 | 4507 |
| R | 11796 | 207 | 63 | 48 | 35 | 2102 | 5385 |
| D | 12366 | 523 | 98 | 22 | 20 | 1435 | 3002 |
| C | 5802 | 245 | 41 | 6 | 6 | 359 | 1629 |
| T | 62727 | 1622 | 349 | 129 | 137 | 9580 | 16931 |

| | TC | Rt | M | D | R | B | T |
|--------------|-------|------|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| 1881: | | | | | | | |
| B | 18077 | 188 | 37 | 33 | 37 | 1946 | 4158 |
| P | 14748 | 370 | 50 | 13 | 32 | 2225 | 3936 |
| R | 11444 | 205 | 50 | 40 | 23 | 2124 | 3291 |
| D | 11642 | 397 | 68 | 19 | 15 | 1553 | 2659 |
| C | 5098 | 300 | 11 | 4 | 8 | 366 | 1347 |
| T | 61009 | 1460 | 216 | 109 | 115 | 8214 | 15391 |
| 1882: | | | | | | | |
| B | 16459 | 179 | 40 | 30 | 31 | 1674 | 3943 |
| P | 15743 | 355 | 39 | 17 | 23 | 2436 | 3917 |
| R | 12711 | 251 | 34 | 42 | 30 | 2274 | 3524 |
| D | 12804 | 608 | 62 | 13 | 12 | 1754 | 3078 |
| C | 4825 | 265 | 15 | 7 | 3 | 454 | 1242 |
| T | 62542 | 1658 | 190 | 109 | 99 | 8592 | 15704 |
| 1883: | | | | | | | |
| B | 15225 | 177 | 38 | 37 | 54 | 1682 | 3719 |
| P | 15154 | 384 | 47 | 18 | 22 | 2577 | 4354 |
| R | 12736 | 322 | 36 | 48 | 39 | 2259 | 3946 |
| D | 11605 | 607 | 56 | 13 | 18 | 2049 | 2881 |
| C | 4403 | 209 | 14 | 4 | 7 | 410 | 1204 |
| T | 59123 | 1699 | 191 | 120 | 140 | 8977 | 16104 |
| 1884: | | | | | | | |
| B | 15645 | 225 | 42 | 44 | 48 | 2178 | 4177 |
| P | 16847 | 460 | 35 | 32 | 18 | 3026 | 4648 |
| R | 15090 | 333 | 31 | 57 | 49 | 2908 | 4785 |
| D | 11089 | 514 | 59 | 12 | 16 | 2366 | 2536 |
| C | 4372 | 199 | 21 | 2 | 4 | 377 | 1052 |
| T | 63043 | 1731 | 188 | 147 | 135 | 10855 | 17198 |
| 1885: | | | | | | | |
| B | 13800 | 281 | 44 | 55 | 61 | 1778 | 3796 |
| P | 15916 | 450 | 42 | 19 | 26 | 3262 | 4683 |
| R | 14634 | 285 | 41 | 55 | 41 | 2787 | 4691 |
| D | 10549 | 475 | 66 | 13 | 13 | 2071 | 3044 |
| C | 4572 | 236 | 15 | 2 | 2 | 315 | 1170 |
| T | 59471 | 1727 | 208 | 144 | 143 | 10213 | 17384 |
| 1886: | | | | | | | |
| B | 14742 | 270 | 40 | 34 | 49 | 1647 | 3351 |
| P | 14699 | 425 | 39 | 9 | 19 | 2860 | 3868 |
| R | 14460 | 360 | 30 | 36 | 36 | 2864 | 4148 |
| D | 11400 | 453 | 53 | 3 | 12 | 2572 | 3302 |
| C | 4954 | 324 | 13 | 4 | 10 | 475 | 1301 |
| T | 60255 | 1632 | 175 | 86 | 126 | 10418 | 15970 |

| | TC | Rt | M | D | R | B | T |
|---------------|-------|------|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| 1887 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 13297 | 278 | NA | 23 | 30 | NA | NA |
| P | 13119 | 284 | NA | 7 | NA | NA | NA |
| R | 14911 | 335 | NA | 23 | 23 | NA | NA |
| D | 11003 | 480 | 45 | 9 | 10 | NA | NA |
| C | 4319 | 313 | NA | 3 | 4 | 4 | NA |
| T | 56649 | 1690 | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 1888 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 14888 | 282 | NA | 18 | 23 | NA | NA |
| P | 13814 | 320 | NA | 18 | NA | NA | NA |
| R | 15065 | 352 | NA | 16 | 29 | NA | NA |
| D | 11421 | 577 | NA | 15 | 10 | NA | NA |
| C | 4132 | 189 | NA | 2 | 12 | NA | NA |
| T | 59320 | 1720 | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 1889 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 17131 | 291 | NA | 34 | 32 | NA | 3035 |
| P | 14954 | 381 | NA | 17 | 15 | NA | NA |
| R | 14438 | 345 | NA | 19 | 18 | NA | NA |
| D | 11921 | 442 | NA | 19 | 21 | NA | NA |
| C | 4610 | 204 | NA | 4 | NA | NA | NA |
| T | 63054 | 1663 | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 1890 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 15880 | 214 | NA | 29 | NA | 477 | NA |
| P | 14945 | 490 | NA | 12 | 14 | NA | NA |
| R | 13884 | 293 | NA | 27 | NA | NA | NA |
| D | 13421 | 519 | NA | 12 | 10 | NA | NA |
| C | 4786 | 207 | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| T | 62916 | 1723 | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 1891 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 18043 | 221 | 33 | 22 | 30 | 1913 | 3471 |
| P | 15300 | 310 | 57 | 29 | 26 | 3966 | 3334 |
| R | 15076 | 285 | 55 | 60 | 41 | 3774 | 4734 |
| D | 15633 | 490 | 105 | 26 | 21 | 3209 | 3595 |
| C | 5526 | 162 | 24 | 3 | 6 | 692 | 1339 |
| T | 69578 | 1468 | 274 | 140 | 124 | 13554 | 16473 |
| 1892 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 20708 | 263 | 43 | 43 | 40 | 2423 | 3898 |
| P | 15981 | 335 | 62 | 41 | 26 | 4034 | 3681 |
| R | 15686 | 233 | 40 | 70 | 36 | 4075 | 5666 |
| D | 17987 | 356 | 94 | 19 | 17 | 3510 | 3788 |
| C | 6405 | 149 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 738 | 1496 |
| T | 74767 | 1336 | 248 | 181 | 128 | 14780 | 18529 |

| | TC | Rt | M | D | R | B | T |
|---------------|--------|------|------|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| 1893 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 20539 | 188 | 44 | 73 | 47 | 2958 | 4195 |
| P | 15336 | 302 | 58 | 30 | 23 | 3615 | 3569 |
| R | 15423 | 225 | 40 | 36 | 26 | 3542 | 4902 |
| D | 17028 | 419 | 103 | 28 | 29 | 3609 | 3652 |
| C | 5415 | 147 | 16 | 0 | 9 | 599 | 1599 |
| T | 73741 | 1281 | 261 | 167 | 134 | 14323 | 17917 |
| 1894 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 19481 | 209 | 38 | 41 | 54 | 2765 | 4269 |
| P | 16043 | 328 | 56 | 36 | 14 | 3752 | 3540 |
| R | 16112 | 258 | 44 | 36 | 43 | 3909 | 5370 |
| D | 19702 | 465 | 107 | 41 | 34 | 4226 | 4281 |
| C | 5801 | 124 | 21 | 2 | 8 | 717 | 1579 |
| T | 77139 | 1424 | 266 | 156 | 153 | 15369 | 19039 |
| 1895 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 20367 | 251 | 50 | 57 | 75 | 2905 | 4401 |
| P | 16877 | 323 | 43 | 34 | 31 | 4174 | 3197 |
| R | 16707 | 231 | 48 | 70 | 49 | 4570 | 5256 |
| D | 19360 | 501 | 127 | 33 | 37 | 4452 | 4065 |
| C | 5481 | 94 | 22 | 4 | 7 | 727 | 1472 |
| T | 78792 | 1400 | 290 | 198 | 199 | 16828 | 18391 |
| 1896 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 23028 | 275 | 47 | 79 | 68 | 2774 | 4762 |
| P | 18063 | 326 | 56 | 37 | 42 | 4681 | 3983 |
| R | 16823 | 227 | 50 | 64 | 63 | 4788 | 5397 |
| D | 22769 | 526 | 127 | 31 | 23 | 6286 | 5005 |
| C | 7250 | 126 | 17 | 3 | 6 | 842 | 1798 |
| T | 87933 | 1480 | -297 | 214 | 202 | 19371 | 20945 |
| 1897 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 29395 | 273 | 53 | 97 | 72 | 4799 | 6012 |
| P | 24212 | 360 | 64 | 50 | 36 | 5927 | 5526 |
| R | 19825 | 267 | 56 | 105 | 63 | 5138 | 5836 |
| D | 25217 | 406 | 60 | 23 | 31 | 5700 | 4684 |
| C | 9782 | 117 | 14 | 9 | 7 | 914 | 1892 |
| T | 108431 | 1423 | 247 | 184 | 209 | 22478 | 23950 |
| 1898 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 25931 | 302 | 52 | 78 | 29 | 3417 | 4901 |
| P | 21693 | 388 | 47 | 32 | 37 | 4057 | 4323 |
| R | 18792 | 264 | 62 | 60 | 49 | 4603 | 4795 |
| D | 23586 | 470 | 87 | 34 | 23 | 4828 | 4171 |
| C | 9935 | 113 | 16 | 8 | 11 | 932 | 1711 |
| T | 99937 | 1537 | 264 | 212 | 149 | 17837 | 19901 |

| | TC | Rt | M | D | R | B | T |
|---------------|--------|------|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| 1899 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 25782 | 278 | 53 | 62 | 57 | 3184 | 4582 |
| P | 20984 | 302 | 48 | 36 | 25 | 3639 | 4241 |
| R | 17391 | 248 | 50 | 49 | 24 | 3986 | 4425 |
| D | 22914 | 450 | 82 | 36 | 12 | 5001 | 4132 |
| C | 8595 | 90 | 24 | 1 | 2 | 1097 | 1296 |
| T | 95666 | 1368 | 257 | 184 | 120 | 16907 | 18676 |
| 1900 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 26228 | 272 | 43 | 98 | NA | 4187 | 3507 |
| P | 21552 | 344 | 39 | 39 | NA | 3993 | 2561 |
| R | 18942 | 321 | 38 | NA | NA | 3714 | 3321 |
| D | 23302 | 410 | 73 | 31 | NA | 4586 | 2835 |
| C | 8870 | 267 | 36 | NA | NA | 951 | 821 |
| T | 98894 | 1614 | 229 | 197 | NA | 17431 | 13045 |
| 1901 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 26395 | 244 | 50 | 94 | 60 | 4273 | 5114 |
| P | 22259 | 384 | 51 | 53 | 34 | 4062 | 4011 |
| R | 19114 | 344 | 51 | 50 | 50 | 3965 | 4429 |
| D | 23076 | 443 | 86 | 31 | 25 | 5482 | 3750 |
| C | 9565 | 241 | 21 | 6 | 7 | 1348 | 1335 |
| T | 100409 | 1656 | 259 | 234 | 176 | 19130 | 18639 |
| 1902 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 27677 | 254 | NA | 107 | NA | 4383 | 5360 |
| P | 22947 | 415 | NA | NA | NA | 3853 | 4255 |
| R | 18351 | 301 | NA | NA | NA | 3694 | 3874 |
| D | 24200 | 365 | NA | NA | NA | 6001 | 3903 |
| C | 9302 | 167 | NA | NA | NA | 1462 | 1765 |
| T | 102477 | 1502 | 250 | 250 | NA | 19393 | 19157 |
| 1903 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 29058 | 255 | NA | 139 | NA | 4980 | 6065 |
| P | 22892 | 328 | NA | NA | NA | 4360 | 4199 |
| R | 20290 | 278 | NA | NA | NA | 3753 | 3940 |
| D | 24603 | 382 | NA | NA | NA | 6995 | 3904 |
| C | 8796 | 182 | NA | NA | NA | 1793 | 1477 |
| T | 105639 | 1425 | 250 | 256 | NA | 21881 | 19585 |
| 1904 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 30623 | 217 | 42 | 114 | NA | 4434 | 5970 |
| P | 23206 | 262 | 64 | NA | NA | 4510 | 4152 |
| R | 20076 | 246 | NA | 44 | NA | 4113 | 4585 |
| D | 24296 | 315 | 70 | NA | NA | 6511 | 3813 |
| C | 8283 | 179 | NA | NA | NA | 1732 | 1521 |
| T | 106484 | 1219 | 240 | 210 | NA | 21300 | 20041 |

| | TC | Rt | M | D | R | B | T |
|---------------|-------|------|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| 1905 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 18637 | 252 | 50 | 81 | NA | 4502 | 5144 |
| P | 14948 | 271 | 35 | NA | NA | 4778 | 3987 |
| R | 12767 | 236 | NA | 73 | NA | 5175 | 5105 |
| D | 13162 | 335 | 92 | 24 | NA | 7015 | 4164 |
| C | 4386 | 120 | 21 | 4 | NA | 2239 | 2034 |
| T | 63900 | 1214 | 248 | 187 | NA | 23709 | 20434 |
| 1906 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 21025 | 191 | 53 | 54 | NA | 4686 | 5889 |
| P | 16659 | 320 | 65 | NA | NA | 6373 | 4775 |
| R | 14550 | 182 | 50 | 80 | NA | 5581 | 5812 |
| D | 18295 | 312 | 108 | 42 | NA | 9525 | 5444 |
| C | 5450 | 89 | 27 | 8 | NA | 2782 | 2064 |
| T | 75979 | 1094 | 303 | 246 | NA | 28947 | 23984 |
| 1907 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 22184 | 220 | 54 | 44 | NA | 5025 | 6302 |
| P | 16451 | 263 | 62 | NA | NA | 6269 | 4743 |
| R | 14091 | 217 | 50 | NA | NA | 5451 | 5282 |
| D | 15944 | 344 | 112 | 54 | NA | 8912 | 4709 |
| C | 5418 | 113 | 26 | NA | NA | 2690 | 1896 |
| T | 74088 | 1157 | 304 | 243 | NA | 28347 | 22932 |
| 1908 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 21573 | 241 | 45 | 49 | NA | 5522 | 5874 |
| P | 17204 | 241 | 78 | 66 | NA | 7001 | 4371 |
| R | 14039 | 240 | 50 | 41 | NA | 6798 | 5786 |
| D | 14849 | 384 | 87 | 86 | NA | 9433 | 3986 |
| C | 4939 | 128 | NA | NA | NA | 2579 | 1569 |
| T | 72604 | 1234 | 274 | 296 | NA | 31333 | 21586 |
| 1909 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 20575 | 183 | 62 | 65 | 56 | 4743 | 6402 |
| P | 15365 | 250 | 60 | 85 | 41 | 5649 | 3847 |
| R | 13830 | 372 | 58 | 106 | 59 | 6494 | 5138 |
| D | 15213 | 515 | 111 | 53 | 38 | 8842 | 3070 |
| C | 4777 | 143 | 32 | 7 | 9 | 2204 | 106 |
| T | 69760 | 1463 | 323 | 316 | 203 | 27932 | 19520 |
| 1910 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 21243 | 187 | 50 | 68 | 69 | 4516 | 5839 |
| P | 15693 | 204 | 61 | 73 | 46 | 6016 | 3772 |
| R | 12308 | 206 | 56 | 93 | 54 | 5880 | 4317 |
| D | 15747 | 277 | 118 | 48 | 29 | 9548 | 3224 |
| C | 5370 | 87 | 32 | 11 | 8 | 2343 | 1188 |
| T | 70361 | 961 | 317 | 293 | 206 | 28303 | 18340 |

| | TC | Rt | M | D | R | B | T |
|---------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| 1911 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 19930 | 83 | 41 | 69 | 63 | 4427 | 5108 |
| P | 16639 | 235 | 56 | 49 | 48 | 5731 | 3496 |
| R | 13495 | 237 | 55 | 83 | 34 | 6318 | 4873 |
| D | 16443 | 303 | 111 | 79 | 30 | 9171 | 3537 |
| C | 5269 | 102 | 31 | 21 | 16 | 2762 | 1280 |
| T | 71776 | 960 | 294 | 301 | 191 | 28409 | 18294 |
| 1912 : | | | | | | | |
| B | 19737 | 85 | 54 | 56 | 57 | 4596 | 5569 |
| P | 15911 | 193 | 74 | 46 | 41 | 5577 | 3525 |
| R | 14738 | 186 | 53 | 38 | 49 | 6176 | 5167 |
| D | 17278 | 296 | 110 | 51 | 34 | 9422 | 3234 |
| C | 5734 | 70 | 26 | 10 | 15 | 2959 | 1186 |
| T | 73398 | 830 | 317 | 201 | 196 | 28730 | 18681 |

Note : (a) 1901 M and R figures of some of the divisions were not available and had to be reconstructed on the basis of average of preceding three to five years' available figures.

(b) The crime figures for the years 1905 to 1912 are of 'true cases investigated' and as such are not identical with 'reported' cases.

Source : *Bengal Police Annual Administration Reports* (1864-1912), including *Eastern Bengal & Assam Police Annual Administration Reports* (1905-1911).

APPENDIX III

**Total cognisable crime (TC), property offences (DRBT)
and price of common rice (RP) in Midnapore district :
1864 - 1904.**

| Year | TC | DRBT | RP(Seers per rupee) |
|------|------|------|---------------------|
| 1864 | 1288 | 957 | 27.3 |
| 65 | 1882 | 1136 | 16.5 |
| 66 | 2560 | 1820 | 9.9 |
| 67 | 1696 | 1030 | 23.3 |
| 68 | 1620 | 1147 | 20.5 |
| 69 | 1570 | 953 | 18.0 |
| 70 | 1178 | 1197 | 25.6 |
| 71 | 2316 | 1153 | 22.2 |
| 72 | 4181 | 2263 | 20.9 |
| 73 | 4406 | 2446 | 21.9 |
| 74 | 4839 | 2581 | 16.4 |
| 75 | 5108 | 2863 | 16.8 |
| 76 | 4392 | 2345 | 24.3 |
| 77 | 4187 | 2143 | 21.3 |
| 78 | 4253 | 2233 | 14.0 |
| 79 | 4488 | 2145 | 14.9 |
| 80 | 4130 | 2049 | 19.1 |
| 81 | 4329 | 2161 | 28.4 |
| 82 | 3874 | 1913 | 29.0 |
| 83 | 3101 | 1748 | 25.1 |
| 84 | 3222 | 1787 | 17.9 |
| 85 | 3026 | 1465 | 18.2 |
| 86 | 3344 | 1134 | 21.9 |
| 87 | 3068 | 1601 | 24.3 |
| 88 | 3064 | 1697 | • 22.0 |
| 89 | 3677 | 1535 | 16.5 |
| 90 | 3376 | 1476 | 17.1 |
| 91 | 4037 | 1229 | 17.5 |
| 92 | 4574 | 1568 | 12.6 |
| 93 | 4680 | 2215 | 13.0 |
| 94 | 4607 | 2391 | 15.0 |
| 95 | 4995 | 2307 | 18.4 |
| 96 | 5534 | 2424 | 15.7 |
| 97 | 6746 | 3063 | 10.4 |
| 98 | 6516 | 2586 | 14.2 |
| 99 | 6703 | 2454 | 16.3 |

| Year | TC | DRBT | RP(Seers per rupee) |
|------|------|------|---------------------|
| 1900 | 7200 | 2782 | 12.6 |
| 01 | 6794 | | 11.9 |
| 02 | 6493 | | 13.1 |
| 03 | 7395 | | 13.3 |
| 04 | 7399 | | 15.2 |

Note : Base for TC and RP = triennial average, 1868-70; base for DRBT = triennial average, 1867-69.

Sources : For TC and DRBT, BPAARs for relevant years, and for RP, *Prices and wages in India* (15th Issue), Calcutta 1898.

APPENDIX IV

Socio-economic background and modus operandi of some criminal groups operating in Bengal (1861-1912)

I. Principal local groups operating in Bengal:

Bediyas of Jessore : The Imperial Gazetteer of India traces their ancestry to the disbanded Muhammedan troops and the Hindu predatory castes found in Bengal during the Pindari onslaught. Though the term Bediya was applied by Risley and others to numerous groups, both Muhammedan and Hindu, including the Sandars and Gains, the Bediyas of Jessore, however, comprised of about 400 adults settled in a few villages in the jurisdictions of police stations Gaighata, Sarsa, Bongaon and Jhikargacha in Jessore district and in Basirhat of 24-Parganas district. By about the beginning of the 20th century, they were no longer nomadic. They preferred to call themselves Shikaris (hunters) and did not like the appellation of Bediya. They also claimed themselves to be Hindus, worshipped Kali and performed the sradh ceremony on the 11th day after death.

They had no regular caste occupation; but as a rule the men worked as day labourers while the women and children made mats from the leaves of date palm. Though immersed in extreme poverty, they considered it below their dignity to beg but resorted to crime as a means of sustenance. This also explains the fact that theft of foodgrains was a common feature of their crimes.

The Jessore Bediya was known to be timid in disposition and generally avoided violence. Burglary and theft were the common forms of crime and he had considerable skill in cutting *sindh*s (holes) for breaking into houses. He disposed of stolen property expeditiously and rarely kept it in his house. Thus around every Bediya settlement there were a number of persons who made a considerable income as receivers of the stolen goods.

The Bediyas committed most of their crimes in the vicinity of their own settlements, but some had been convicted of crimes in Nadia, Khulna, Hooghly, 24-Parganas and Calcutta. In 1907 a Bediya gang was traced in the northern suburbs of Calcutta where it had been committing crime in association with up-country and Calcutta criminals. They almost invariably went to Calcutta when they wanted to hide from the police.

Code words used by them included *manghee* (sindh), *beli* (theft), *kakaroo* (Police), *chappoki* (hiding) etc.

Bhumij : Col. Dalton's *Ethnology of Bengal* classed the Bhumij with the Hos and Mundas, as one of the three divisions of the Kols. Risley considered them to be descendants of the Mundas of Chhotanagpur who migrated to the east and underwent considerable change as regards language and social and religious customs after coming into increasing contact with the Hindus of Bengal. The great bulk of the Bhumij people were simple cultivators and labourers but an upper section, mostly landholders, were gradually trying to make themselves out to be Rajputs and sever their connection with their non-Aryan kinsmen of Chhotanagpur.

Polygamy, divorce and re-marriage of widows were accepted social customs. Their system of disposal of their dead was quite unusual, combining both cremation and burial. The deadbody was first burnt and then the ashes were interred in their own houses.

Cultivation was their main occupation, the poorer men working as day labourers while the headmen owned sufficient land for agriculture. On the whole the Bhumij people were not considered to be a criminal class even by the Police. The reputation of criminality attached to the Bhumij in the Manbhum district of Bihar (now Purulia district in West Bengal) and the south west corner of Bankura district. The Bhumij population in Midnapore district was quite considerable - 22,041 males according to the 1911 census but their criminality in this district was not marked. The Lodhas of Midnapore district were considered as part of the Bhumij tribe but this view was not shared by the later social anthropologists. The number of Bhumij males in the south-western part of Bankura district, which previously formed part of Manbhum, was 9477 in 1911 census.

During the 19th century, the Bhumij of the Jangal Mahals, covering tracts of Midnapore, Bankura and Manbhum districts were spoken of as *chuars* (literally, uncivilized ones) and were a terror to the local population. The Bhumij uprisings of 1798 and 1832 were quelled by the use of military force but a certain section continued with their traditional marauding habits. In 1897 the Police discovered the existence of a very formidable gang headed by one Haladhar Bhumij which was responsible for much of the violent crimes of Manbhum and Bankura districts since 1867. A serious outbreak of dacoity in 1905 in Bankura and Manbhum districts was traced back to the remnants of this gang.

The Bhumij planned their depredations (mainly dacoities) with care after collecting detailed information through informers. While

committing dacoities, they carried spears, tangis (axes) and swords as well as firearms and in almost all cases they treated the inmates of the houses they looted with great cruelty. Generally they opened their attack with a shower of stones and illuminated their subsequent proceedings with improvised torches (*mashal*). Sometimes they wore masks to conceal their identity.

They figured prominently in the police records of the following police stations: Khatra, Raipur, Chhatna and Indpur in Bankura district, and in Bandwan, Manbazar, Hura, Purulia, Barabazar and Gourangdi in Manbhum district.

Bagdis, Podes and Kaoras : These low-caste Hindus of Bengal were not necessarily criminals but they are included in this narrative because a large number of them were found to have been included in the dacoit gangs of Burdwan and Presidency divisions. In the commission of crime, they mixed freely with other castes of Hindus and with Muhammedans. The Bagdis in particular were expert lathials and were recruited as such by the zamindars.

Risley described the Bagdis as a cultivating, fishing and menial caste of central and western Bengal, divided into 11 subcastes which were sub-divided into a number of exogamous sections. Tentulia and Kasaikulia Bagdis used to work as masons and also in preparing lime for building constructions. Dulia Bagdis carried palanquins (*dulis*).

Old Police records show the Bagdis of Midnapore, Bankura, Burdwan, Birbhum, Hooghly and Murshidabad as notorious dacoits and robbers, skilful lathials and experts in scaling walls. During the first decade of the 20th century the most actively criminal Bagdis were found in Diamond Harbour sub-division of 24-Parganas, Arambagh sub-division of Hooghly and Sadar sub-division of Burdwan districts.

The Podes were described by Risley as "a fishing, cultivating, landholding and trading caste of Lower Bengal, found in large numbers in 24-Parganas" but also in Jessore, Murshidabad, Malda, Midnapore and Balasore districts. The Podes were by religion Hindus. They generally combined with Bagdis and Kaoras, and sometimes with Muhammedans in commission of crime. During the first decade of the twentieth century, the Podes were found to be very active as criminals in the Diamond Harbour sub-division of 24-Parganas district, especially in Mograhat, Mathurapur and Kulpi police stations.

The Kaoras were considered to be a sub-caste of the Haris. They reared pigs and prepared molasses from the juice of the date palm. Many of them were also employed as cooks in European and Eurasian families.

As with Podes, it was in Diamond Harbour sub-division that their criminality was most marked, and they were generally associated with Podes, Bagdis and sometimes with Musalmans in criminal disposition.

Lodhas : Risley described them as an aboriginal tribe inhabiting the jungle tracts in the western parts of Midnapore district, still clinging to the predatory instincts of their ancestors who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, overran parts of the district, giving great trouble to the authority and causing terror to the inhabitants of the villages near the jungle tracts. According to Risley, they too were known as *Chuars* and their raids were called *chuaris*. They turned out in large numbers for these raids, armed with swords, axes and other weapons and carried off any articles they could lay hands on, using utmost violence in case of resistance.

According to the 1911 census, the number of Lodha males in Bengal was 3793, of whom 3116 lived in Midnapore and 549 in Hooghly district. They lived in small huts in the outskirts of the jungles, the majority in the jurisdiction of Naraingarh police station and some in the adjoining Midnapore, Kharagpur, Danton and Sabang police station areas.

Between 1902 and 1904 extensive police operations were launched against the Lodhas resulting in arrest and conviction of many. The following extract from the judgement of the Lodha gang dacoity case of 1905 under section 400 IPC in Midnapore reveals the modus operandi and other details of the Lodha gangs: "From the evidence of the approvers, some of whom have already been convicted of dacoity, and of the victims whose property has been looted, we find that the dacoits numbered altogether 200 persons, and attached in bands of 60 to 70. They carried weapons, and also laterite stones which lie in abundance in the west of this district. The houses attacked were cleared of all property, the inmates at times receiving injuries, and in two cases the injuries resulted in death. Often more than one house was attacked, and not only houses but shops on the high roads or boats in the canal. Everything available including jewellery, articles of food, clothing, cash, utensils etc. were carried off. The cash was spent, the food consumed, sometimes on the spot. The jewellery was easily disposed of among the numerous receivers in the villages around. The modus operandi of the dacoits was in all cases similar : while a few men armed with swords, lathis and axes (tangis) ransacked the premises and were stripping the women of their ornaments, some remained outside and kept at bay all who attempted to approach by flinging stones".

During the police operations which preceded the institution of the above gang case, the Lodhas abandoned their huts and took to the jungles, many taking refuge in the nearby native State of Mayurbhanj, while others escaped to Assam as tea garden labourers. Even otherwise the Lodhas in small number were emigrating to the Assam tea gardens where they were looked upon as good labourers. A police record of early twentieth century mentioned that the Lodhas "must be regarded as one of the many aboriginal tribes who, having been driven into the jungles by the advance of superior civilization, have been compelled by extreme poverty to rely on the proceeds of crime for their existence."

Tuntia Musalmans : Deriving their name from *Tunt* or mulberry (the cultivation of which was their main occupation during the heyday of the silk industry), the Tuntia Musalmans were mostly found working as cultivators, agricultural labourers, cart drivers, shopkeepers, fishermen and masons.

In 1913 adult men and women numbered about 6000 each, with about 8000 children. Of these 281 men and women were involved in crime, mostly as members of criminal gangs. Writing in 1911, the author, of the District Gazetteer of Midnapore allude to their 'criminal reputation' and their involvement in dacoities. Usually residents of the districts of Midnapore, Hooghly and Burdwan and of Beliaghata area of Calcutta, their criminal exploits extended to a much wider field, as shown by the confessions of a gang leader named Panchu Shaikh (Special Report case No.44 of 1905, Hooghly District) who admitted involvement in 22 cases spread over the districts of 24 Parganas, Nadia, Jessore, Burdwan, Midnapore and Hooghly. Police records indicate that the Tuntia Musalmans often committed dacoities as members of a mixed gang which could also have Sundis, Bagdis, Muahis as well as Musalmans of other classes. In a gang case instituted in Hooghly district in 1904, for example, a mixed gang of 134 persons was broken up and 15 Tuntias were convicted.

A distinctive feature of a Tuntia dacoity was the use of the *dhenki* for breaking open the doors of the target house. Torches and lathis were carried but the Tuntias did not as a rule use unnecessary violence. The spoils were generally divided immediately after the operation in some secluded spot and each man left to dispose his share to a receiver in his own way.

Sandars : Classified in the 1911 census as Bediyas, the Sandars were a nomadic and boat-based tribe, found principally in the districts

of Pabna, Rajshahi, Bogra, Faridpore, Dacca and Mymensingh. The name Sandar is said to be derived from *sana* or the shuttle of a weaving loom which they used to make and sell when the weaving industry flourished in Bengal. The Sandars followed the observances of the Muhammedan religion but were generally considered an inferior sect and were rarely admitted in orthodox mosques.

The great majority of Sandars lived on land only during the winter months. From April they would take to the water, travelling in *bohors* or flotillas of 30 boats, each *bohor* having a number of small, swift boats of the Pansey type which were used by the Sandars on criminal expeditions.

The Superintendent of Police, Pabna, observed in 1894 that nine-tenths of the river dacoities in Bengal were committed by Sandars who would normally only concentrate on cash. Anchoring the bohor near the junction of two or three streams, a party of Sandars would proceed in their light boats 10 or 20 miles upstream and then perhaps commit two or three river dacoities in quick succession.

Though Sandar women did not participate in an organized dacoity, they were considered equally adept at riverside burglaries, snatching and petty pilfering at melas.

The field of operation of the Sandars extended to the districts of Dacca, Bakarganj, Faridpore, Dinajpur, Malda, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Bogra, Jalpaiguri, Pabna, Chittagong and Tipperah as well as the State of Cooch Behar and some districts in the province of Assam.

II. Principal criminal groups operating in Bengal with origins outside Bengal:

Barwars : The Barwar tribes hailed from the districts of Gonda, Hardoi and Sultanpur (UP) and were declared to be criminal tribes under the Criminal Tribes Acts of 1884 and 1911. Professing to be a branch of Kurmis, they had actually evolved into a heterogeneous group admitting degenerate Brahmans as well as Ahirs and Chamars. They usually followed the religion of low-caste Hindus.

The Barwars were said to work as cultivators and day-labourers in their home districts but to the Police of Bengal they were 'inveterate and skilful thieves'. They operated in gangs all over India and came down to Bengal in large parties. They were particularly skilful at running train thefts, generally alighting at wayside stations with the luggage of slumbering passengers. Frequently the actual stealing would be

committed by young and trained boys of the age-group 7 - 14 years to ward off suspicion and detection of the main gang. A favourite ploy of theirs was to sit quietly in the waiting sheds of a railway station and to mark a likely victim. They would then spread out a newly washed *chader* over the article to be stolen and subsequently remove the *chader* together with the article. The Barwar women would often accompany the men on their criminal expeditions and disguised as Brahman women, gain entrance into a house for stealing valuables or rob worshippers at places of pilgrimage.

The Barwars were found in Bengal more frequently than any other up-country thieving class, particularly at railway and steamer stations such as Goolando, Jagannathganj, Chandpur, Sara Ghat, Sirajganj, Lalgolaghat, Ranaghat and Kharagpur.

Bhamptas : The Bhamptas (residents of the districts of Poona, Satara, Sholapur, Ahmednagar, Nasik, Khandesh, Belgaum and Bijapur in Bombay Presidency), also known as Uchhlis or Ghantichars, were declared as a criminal tribe of the Bombay Presidency in 1912.

The Bhampta community admitted many Hindu castes as well as Muhammedans and Parsis and therefore did not form a distinct caste though they had their own rules and observances. They generally followed Hindu religious practices and always initiated a criminal operation with the worship of Kali.

The Bhamptas were well-known for clever disguise, sporting Mahratta, Marwari and even European dress as the occasion demanded. They spoke fluent Hindi besides their mother-tongue and many had a smattering of English. They also had a private code of signals as well as a thorough knowledge of train timings.

Expert thieves and pick-pockets, the Bhamptas frequented fairs, railway stations and important places of pilgrimage. Above all, they were masters in the art of running train robbery and it is this form of crime that was most prominently associated with the Bhamptas in Bengal.

After reaching their destination, usually town, a Bhampta criminal gang would split up into smaller groups and follow a promising passenger into the railway compartment, purchasing a similar ticket. The Bhamptas would then establish themselves as congenial companions and gradually proceed to remove cash and jewellery from canvas or leather bags or even locked steel trunks. They used with a very high degree of skill implements such as false keys, knives, needle and thread (to resew bags), steel sarota (for cutting through steel or brass hasps) and steel

chisels (for opening boxes). Stolen cash was usually sent to the homes of the Bhamptas by money-order and jewellery by parcel post. Bhampta women were known to be expert thieves and committed thefts in female compartments.

In Bengal the Bhamptas were conspicuously active in Ranaghat, Kushtea, Saidpur, Dacca, Howrah, Raiganj, Goalando and Kharagpur and the Dacca-Mymensingh Railway, which they covered from Narainganj.

Bhurs : The Bhurs mostly belonged to UP and commonly hailed from the districts of Azamgarh, Bahia Benares, Fyzabad, Ghazipur, Gorakhpur, Jaunpur, and Mirzapur. Some were also to be found in Bihar in the districts of Champaran, Saran and Shahabad. Considering their appearance and physique, Crooks believed them to be of Dravidian descent, closely allied to the Koles, Cheros and Seors.

Known to be good workmen, the Bhurs were in great demand as labourers and were found in large numbers in Calcutta and its surrounding districts, in the coalfields, in the districts of Dacca, Mymensingh, Faridpur, and on all the railways. They worked as mill-hands, coolies, day-labourers, cart-drivers, palanquin bearers and cultivators and visited their native places periodically.

The Bhurs professed to be Hindus and worshipped the deities Kali and Siva with offerings of intoxicating liquor, which they indulged in freely. Widow remarriage was prevalent among them.

In UP the Bhurs of Aligarh, Benares, Jaunpur and Azamgarh districts were proclaimed under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1911. In 1914 the Bengal Government required all Bhurs in the Bengal Presidency who were convicted for specific cases, to furnish security for good behaviour under the same Act. In that year their number (all males) was 271 out of a total Bhur population of 2064.

The Bhurs were primarily associated with various forms of theft: from dacoity to shop-pilfering and pocket-picking. Their modus operandi varied with the circumstances. In burglary they sometimes gained entry by means of the *sindh*. In dacoities they often used axes to break open doors and chests. When on a criminal expedition, they would sometimes carry measuring rods and baskets in order to pass as contractors and labourers.

Bhur crimes in Bengal have been traced back to 1874 but it was not until 1897 that the police came to realise that they were daring and dangerous. In that year there was an outbreak of dacoity in the colliery

districts, the most noticeable feature of which was the frequent use of dynamite to frighten the villagers. Police enquiries led to the arrest of a Bhur gang leader who named 34 Bhur accomplices and confessed to 31 dacoities in the districts of Birbhum, Burdwan, Hooghly and Manbhum between September 1896 and June 1897. In November 1898 there was another serious outbreak of dacoity by Bhurs and arrested Bhur criminals confessed to 48 dacoities between 1898 and 1903 in the districts of Burdwan, Dacca, Faridpur, Hooghly, Howrah, Midnapur, Mymensingh, Nadia and French Chandernagore. In 1904 a gang case was started on the basis of the above confessions in which 21 Bhurs were convicted, 3 being transported for life and the rest for 10 years. Gang cases involving the Bhurs continued to be instituted and between 1910 and 1914, 32 Bhurs were convicted under various cases.

As indicated by conviction records, the criminal activity of the Bhurs was spread over the following Bengal districts: 24- Parganas, Calcutta, Howrah, Hooghly, Midnapur, Dacca, Burdwan, Dinajpur, Malda, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Nadia, Bogra and Mymensingh.

Chhapparbands : Mostly residents of Bijapur district of the Bombay Presidency, the Chhapparbands were notorious as makers and utterers of counterfeit coins and were proclaimed under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1912.

In their homes they cultivated land but in their country wide wanderings, their ostensible means of livelihood was mendicancy, in the guise of indigent Muhammedans. Their native language was Marathi though they had a slang of their own and were quick at picking up other languages.

The Chapparbands usually travelled in groups of 3 to 10 under the leadership of an elderly and experienced man called *Khagda* and manufactured fake coins in course of their travels. The women did not accompany the men in these travels.

They used the post office to send the booty to their homes. They devised an ingenious method of indicating the route to be followed by their fellow members. At road crossings they made a heap of mud or earth about a foot long and six inches high, and drew an arrow in front of it showing the direction to be taken. Three such heaps were made at intervals of a hundred yards or so to provide against mistake. Some of them used other types of roadside signs to serve the same purpose.

Magahiya Doms : Magahiya Doms hailed from the districts of Saran and Champaran in Bihar and Gorakhpur and Azamgarh in U.P.

They were known to be inveterate drunkards and their chief deities (Gandak and Samai or Samaya) were worshipped with oblations of liquor and the sacrifice of pigs. A successful theft or burglary was generally followed by a prolonged drinking bout.

Among the Magahiya Doms the commission of crime was regarded as an obligation of manhood almost amounting to a religious duty. A Magahiya Dom reaching manhood without having taken part in a successful theft or burglary would have been regarded with disfavour by the females of the caste and with contempt by the males.

Their usual forms of crime were burglary and theft, and at times highway robbery. They preferred to sneak into a house when the door was open and carry off anything they could lay their hands on. Otherwise the Magahiya Dom's typical method of effecting entry was by *bagli sindh*, i.e., by cutting a small hole in the wall close to the door-post so that he could put in his arm to open the door latch. He generally carried with him a box of matches and would strike a light after getting inside. If he could burgle one house without rousing the inmates, he would go on to burgle the next house and so on. He was remarkably clever in eluding his pursuers, a favourite method being to scamper off on all fours howling like a jackal. They also practised a form of swindling known as bead swindling, which consisted of offering for sale brass beads represented as gold. The women were generally the practitioners of this form of crime.

Though many among the Magahiya Doms used to earn an honest living by working as municipal sweepers and scavengers in Bengal, they were reputed to be addicted to crime as well. Regarding it as inevitable that a considerable part of every Magahiya's life would be spent in jail, they had a recognised custom that during the absence of a husband in jail, his wife could attach herself temporarily for the maintenance of herself and the children to any other member of the caste, returning to her former husband on his release.

Jadua Brahmans : The term 'Jadua', meaning magician, referred to a sect of Brahmans found principally in Patna and in the thanas of Mahua and Hajipur in the district of Muzaffarpur. As they indulged in fish, meat and liquor and did not observe the religious practices associated with true Brahmans, they were looked down as a degenerate caste.

The notoriety of the Jadua Brahmans was connected with a particular form of swindling which had been almost a monopoly of theirs in earlier

times. Their favourite ploy was the promise to double the wealth of the victim or to transform his silver into gold by magic. The actual procedure usually took the form of the well-known 'double trick'. The possessions of the dupe were tied by the Brahman into a bundle or sometimes concealed in a specially made ball of clay. The Brahman then managed to extract the valuables by sleight-of-hand before burying the bundle or the ball of clay in the mud floor of the house. Occasionally the valuables were actually buried in the presence of the victim, to be extracted at night when the duped owner was asleep. After due chanting of mantras, the Jadua Brahman would depart, assuring the victim that when he digs up the buried articles at right time, he will find the magic accomplished. By this time the valuables would have been conveyed to other confederates and when the fraud was finally discovered, the swindlers would be far away.

Karwal Nuts : In the old Bengal Police Code the Karwals were described as a hunting and criminal tribe. In the 1911 census though about 10,000 persons were enumerated as "Nuts", no caste or tribe was entered under the heading "Karwal Nuts". About 2500 persons entered as "Nuts" were found in the Rajshahi division. A preliminary registration of the Karwal Nuts was attempted in 1913 with a view to place them under the Criminal Tribes Act and enquiries revealed that their ancestors came from Bhojpur (in the district of Arrah). The Bengal Government made the Act applicable to the tribe generally known as Karwals.

The Karwal Nuts generally followed the customs of very lowcaste up-country Hindus. They worshipped Kali and also two lesser deities of their own, called Deo and Kushmina. They had no priests and ate meat including pork. A small section was also said to follow an irregular form of Muhammedanism. Their language was a patois of Hindustani with slang words of their own. Dark complexioned, and of good stature, they dressed like low caste Hindus of Bihar and U.P., the long skirts of the women affording good concealment for stolen articles.

The Nuts led a nomadic life, wandering in gangs of three or four to 25 with their cloth or bamboo mat tents and their herd of buffaloes, ponies, donkeys and goats. The women took a prominent part in the command of the gang whether in camp or on the march.

Though the Karwal men sometimes professed to trade in animals, their ostensible means of livelihood was begging while the women earned money by music and dance and occasionally by prostitution. However, the Karwal Nuts were all known to be thieves by profession and the women as active in crime as the men. They committed all types

of crime against property along their line of march, the most common offence being the theft of utensils and goats. Further, they caused great damage to the standing crops by stealing. Burglary was a common crime with them but there was no case on record of their using *sindhs* as means of entry.

Case records show that their usual method of pilfering was to go round a village begging for alms with the objective of locating a house where the men were absent. When such a house was found, some of the women in the party would distract attention by singing, dancing or begging while others would pilfer any ornaments or cash that could be smuggled out from the house.

In the early twentieth century, Karwal Nuts were convicted in the districts of Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Purnea, Pabna, Mymensingh, Nadia, Rangpur, Malda, Jalpaiguri, Bogra, Darjeeling, Murshidabad and Goalpara in Assam. In the preliminary registration of 1913, 17 gangs were found in North Bengal totalling 241 adults of whom 89% of the men and 66% of the women were eventually convicted for various nonbailable offences.

Kepmaris or Inakoravars : According to a memorandum prepared for the Government of Madras by P.B.Thomas (DIG of Police, Madras), "There is no community in the (Madras) Presidency which is a better instance of a genuine Criminal Tribe and to which the application of the Criminal Tribes Act is more justifiable". Considered to be a branch of the great Koravar tribe (though not acknowledged as such by the Kepmaris themselves), the Kepmaris or Inakoravars were a fraternity rather than a caste. It was a regular practice with them to kidnap or to buy female children of better castes for marrying them off with Kepmari boys. Male children of other castes, however, were seldom admitted to the tribe.

They differed from the ordinary nomadic criminal gangs in that they all belonged to some permanent settlement where the members had houses to which they periodically returned. They rarely committed any crime in the vicinity of these settlements. Further, they were educated and expert thieves, using freely the railways and the post offices. The men were house-breakers, pick-pockets and pilferers, operating on the railways, in towns, at festivals and gatherings, wherever opportunity arose anywhere in the Presidency. They dressed and lived extremely well and knew several languages including Telugu, Canarese, Tamil, Hindustani and occasionally English. Evidently, they were not driven into criminal livelihoods because of indigent circumstances.

The principal settlement of the tribe was in the village of Edayapatti in Trichinopoly district of Madras. This village had about 25 houses, 13 belonging to the Kepmaris. The Koravars of this settlement were proclaimed under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1913 by the Government of Madras. In the settlement population of about 210, the total number of convictions was found to be 260 and the total number of security cases 107.

With the extension of railways, the Kepmari settlements multiplied and their operations spread to Bombay, Bengal and U.P. A great many railway thefts committed on the Puri line in 1898 were traced to the criminal activity of the Kepmaris and in 1904 large Kepmari gangs were located in Cuttack and Puri districts. The Kepmaris often followed the *modus operandi* of the Bhamptas when committing railway thefts, though they preferred to work on platforms and waiting halls at railway stations.

Pasis : The Pasis hailed from the eastern districts of U.P. and certain districts of Bihar. Their original occupation was the tapping of palm trees for the extraction of *Tari* or indigenous liquor and their caste name was derived from the *pasa* or the sling that they used for climbing the trees. The Pasis also worked as cultivators, day-labourers and petty shop-keepers. They were low-caste Hindus and ate meat including pork and indulged in drinking.

The Pasis as a community bore a bad reputation and were considered as more dangerous and hardened criminals than the Bhurs and Dusadhs of U.P. The Pasis were attracted in large numbers to the labour centres of Bengal and were found working in the mills around Calcutta, in the coal mines of Burdwan and at all labour centres of Rangpur, Pabna, Dacca and Mymensingh and as mallahs on the up-country boats plying in the Bengal rivers. Their criminal activities included burglary, robbery and theft. They were experts in cutting sindhs and often offered violent resistance when intercepted. There was ample evidence to indicate that the Pasi criminals generally worked in collusion with the zamindars and even the Police of their home districts and instead of selling off their loot in Bengal itself, preferred to return home every year and share it with their collaborators.

In 1904 the U.P. Government proclaimed under the Criminal Tribes Act all Pasis convicted of non-bailable offences in certain villages of U.P. In Bengal the Pasis were convicted for criminal activity in the districts of Jessore, Faridpur, Rangpur, Nadia, Midnapur, Burdwan,

Dacca, Mymensingh and in areas surrounding Calcutta. Between 1904 and 1908, 3 gang cases were successfully instituted against the Pasis in the 24-Parganas district.

Mallahs and other river criminals : According to Crooke, the name denotes "an occupational aggregate made up of very divergent elements" including boating and fishing tribes. They mostly belonged to the NWP districts of Allahabad, Benaras, Ghazipore, Ballia, Gorakhpur, Faizabad and Mirzapore. Though there was a common belief among many policemen both in Bengal and the NWP that Mallahs by and large were criminals, there were quite some among the senior police officials (e.g. C.W.C. Plowden and F.C. Daly, two successive Deputy Inspectors-General of Police of the Bengal CID during the first decade of the twentieth century) who thought otherwise and held that not all Mallahs were to be branded as criminals. The Bengal CID estimated in 1913 that there were 'at least 6000 known criminal Mallahs from up-country, wandering about Bengal'. It was conceded, however, that though the greater portion of the boatmen who came down (to Bengal) from the U.P. and Bihar were honest traders and carriers, many boats from these parts were believed to come to Bengal with selected criminal crews, crime being the main object of their expedition.

The Mallahs used to make long journeys down the Ganges, sometimes proceeding as far as Chittagong and the Sunderbans, down the Bhagirathi, Bagmati and other rivers towards Calcutta, Jessore and Nadia; up the Brahmaputra and Meghna into the forests of Cooch Behar and Alipore Duars, whence they brought down timber for disposal at depots in Bengal.

They generally left their homes about the month of August but individual members frequently journeyed to and from their homes by train, joining or leaving their gangs at the various centres of upcountry criminals in Bengal. Some of their favourite centres were Azimganj (Murshidabad district), Damukdia, Mirpur, Poradhab, Kushtia and Khoksha (Nadia district), Saraghat, Serajganj, (Pabna district), Narayanganj (Dacca district), Bhairab Bazar (Mymensingh district), Pangsá, Goalundo (Faridpur district), Phulchari, Jatrampur (Rangpur district) and Dhubri (in Goalpara district of Assam). Though some of the Mallahs remained in Bengal with their boats all the year round, the majority returned to their homes in the spring i.e. around the Holi festival.

They did not confine themselves to crime on the water, and sometimes travelled a considerable distance from the river bank to

commit land burglaries. Money stolen was frequently remitted home by money order. Jewellery was disposed of to the local receivers or broken up and kept in concealment to be disposed of on return home, to the regular receivers there.

Chain Mallahs were the more notorious among the Mallah group of river criminals. According to Crooke, nothing certain was known about the origin of the name 'Chain', but they were also known as Uchakha, Uthaigira or Jebkatra (i.e. one who picks pocket). They were known to frequent fairs and bathing places, and the boys were put to stealing while the men acted as 'fences' and engaged the attention of the victims or otherwise facilitated the escape of the thief. They were to be found in nearly all the districts of eastern Bengal, specially in Rajshahi, Pabna, Rangpur and Dacca. The records of their conviction in eastern Bengal show that the majority of the Chain Mallahs arrested in Bengal came from the U.P. districts of Ballia, Jaunpur and Gorakhpur. In 1914 certain Mallahs in Aligarh, Agra and Mathura districts (U.P.) and the Chain Mallahs of Ballia, Gorakhpur and Mirzapur districts (U.P.) were declared to be criminal tribes under the Criminal Tribes Act.

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APPENDIX V

Inmates of Bengal jails distributed by caste and religion (1911)

| Caste | Burdwan | Pres- idency (excluding Calcutta) | Cal- cutta | Rajs- bahi | Dacca | Chitta- gong | Hill Tip- pera | Total |
|------------------------|---------|--|---------------|---------------|-------|-----------------|----------------------|-------|
| Bagdi | 113 | 70 | 9 | 2 | - | - | - | 194 |
| Baidya | 1 | 20 | 5 | 3 | 26 | - | - | 55 |
| Baishnab (Bairagi) | 33 | 51 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 3 | - | 102 |
| Baniya | 18 | 1 | - | - | 4 | - | - | 23 |
| Bauri | 39 | 6 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 46 |
| Bhar | 5 | 19 | 1 | - | - | - | - | 25 |
| Bhuimali | - | 2 | - | - | 18 | - | - | 20 |
| Bhuiya | 13 | 6 | - | 10 | 2 | - | - | 31 |
| Brahman | 128 | 175 | 118 | 44 | 72 | 5 | - | 542 |
| Buddhist | - | - | - | - | 26 | 2 | - | 28 |
| Chamar | 23 | 37 | 17 | - | 1 | - | - | 78 |
| Chasa | 148 | 3 | - | - | - | - | - | 151 |
| Dhoba | 3 | 22 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 4 | - | 42 |
| Dom | 62 | 48 | 18 | 9 | 1 | 1 | - | 139 |
| Dosadh | 5 | 43 | 10 | 5 | 1 | - | - | 64 |
| Goala | 60 | 125 | 36 | 18 | 23 | - | - | 262 |
| Halwai | - | 21 | 3 | 1 | 1 | - | - | 26 |
| Hari | 13 | 10 | - | 9 | - | - | - | 32 |
| Indian Christian | 4 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 5 | - | - | 25 |
| Jolaha | 4 | 22 | 1 | - | - | - | - | 27 |
| Jogi | - | 10 | 1 | - | 13 | 4 | - | 28 |
| Kahar | 17 | 69 | 38 | 6 | 5 | - | - | 135 |
| Kaibarta (Unspecified) | 40 | 31 | 24 | - | - | - | - | 95 |
| Kaibarta (Chasi) | 16 | 37 | 1 | - | - | - | - | 93 |
| Kaibarta (Jaliya) | 1 | 6 | - | 4 | 30 | - | - | 41 |
| Kalwar | 3 | 23 | 4 | - | - | - | - | 30 |
| Kamar | 8 | 14 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 2 | - | 41 |
| Kasra | 3 | 35 | 2 | - | - | - | - | 40 |
| Kapali | 1 | 14 | - | 7 | - | - | - | 29 |
| Kayasth | 51 | 111 | 93 | 10 | 513 | 9 | - | 817 |
| Khandait | 3 | 21 | 16 | - | - | - | - | 40 |
| Koiri | 4 | 10 | 3 | 2 | 5 | - | - | 24 |
| Kshatriya | 1 | 8 | 51 | - | - | - | - | 60 |
| Kurmi | 7 | 37 | 14 | 9 | 20 | 1 | - | 88 |
| Lohar | 29 | 14 | 2 | - | - | - | - | 45 |
| Mallah | 1 | 13 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 1 | - | 25 |
| Mehter | 15 | 7 | 2 | - | 2 | - | - | 26 |
| Muchi | 10 | 80 | 6 | 5 | 12 | - | - | 113 |

Continue

| Caste | Burdwan | Pres- idency (excluding Calcutta) | Cal- cutta | Rajs- hahi | Dacca | Chitta- gong | Hill Tip- pera | Total |
|------------------|---------|--|---------------|---------------|-------|-----------------|----------------------|-------|
| Musalman | - | - | - | 857 | 1925 | 593 | 1 | 3376 |
| Namasudra | 3 | 68 | - | 7 | 168 | 22 | - | 268 |
| Napit | 3 | 28 | 11 | 1 | 14 | 1 | - | 58 |
| Pan | - | 20 | 1 | - | - | - | - | 21 |
| Pathan | 19 | 69 | 23 | - | - | - | - | 111 |
| Pasi | 3 | 22 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 26 |
| Pod | 1 | 52 | 1 | - | - | - | - | 54 |
| Rajbansi | 2 | 8 | 2 | 28 | 3 | - | - | 43 |
| Rajput (Chhatri) | 7 | 8 | 53 | 34 | 31 | 1 | - | 184 |
| Sadgop | 12 | 34 | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | 49 |
| Saiyad | 3 | 22 | 13 | 1 | - | - | - | 39 |
| Santal | 63 | 5 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 69 |
| Sarar | 32 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 32 |
| Shaha | - | - | - | 8 | 15 | 3 | - | 26 |
| Shaikh | 286 | 1140 | 360 | 9 | - | - | - | 1795 |
| Subarnabanik | 2 | 33 | 6 | 1 | 2 | - | - | 44 |
| Sunri | 4 | 10 | 4 | - | 2 | - | - | 20 |
| Tanti & Tatwa | 32 | 23 | 9 | 2 | 4 | - | - | 70 |
| Teli & Tili | 17 | 39 | 26 | 3 | 6 | 2 | - | 93 |
| Others | 131 | 210 | 104 | 117 | 65 | 14 | - | 642 |

Source : *Census of India*, 1911, Vol.V, Part II, Appendix to Table XVI-Part II, pp.381-82.

APPENDIX VI

Major incidents of communal disorder in Bengal (1891-1912)

(Note : Abbreviations used -

a = composition of rioters : H = Hindus
M = Muslims
HM = mostly Hindus
MH = mostly Muslims
H+M = Hindus and Muslims, but
proportion not known.

b = Nature of confrontation: H = attacks by Hindus
M = " " Muslims
H/M = " " both Hindus
and Muslims
r/p = rioters vs. police

c = other available information like cases, arrests, convictions etc.

d = source of information)

| Sl. No. of incidents | Year/period of occurrence | Place of occurrence (district) | Issue | Composition of rioters, nature of confrontation, casualties etc. |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|--|--|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| A. 1891 - 1904 | | | | |
| 1. | 1891 16 May | Shyambazar/Ultadanga (Calcutta) | Execution of ejectment decree of court on a plot of land (Nikanipara) claimed to have been used as a mosque and riotous demonstration by Muslims in protest. | a. M, 2-3 thousand, mostly upcountrymen of Jolaha (weaver) caste. b. r/p c. 2 Police constables and 1 rioter killed, large number of policemen & rioters injured; over 100 arrested. d. GOI Home(Pub)/ June 1891/62-67; GOI Home(Pub)/ Aug. 1891/74-78. |
| 2. | 1895 | Kendua Iron Works, Kulti (Burdwan) | Cow-killing | a. H (3-5 hundred) factory workers believed to be up-countrymen. |

Continue

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---|--|---|
| | | | | b. H c. NA d. BPAAR, 1895, p.52 |
| 3. | 1897 29 June- July | Tala (Calcutta) | as under Sl.1 but over another plot of land, also in North Calcutta | a. M (approx.2000, mostly low-class weavers,bricklayers etc. & believed to be up-countrymen) b. r/p c. 11 rioters killed, over 20 injured. Troops called out. Considerable tension among Muslim workers in mills and factories around Calcutta. d. GOI Home(Pub.)/ Oct. 1897/124-57. |
| 4. | 1898 2 May | Rishra (Hooghly) | Cow-killing during Bakr-Id | a. H+M(mostly mill workers, presumably upcountrymen) b. H/M c. 1 killed, 18 seriou- sly injured. Army called out. d. GOI Home (Pub.)B /July 1898/80-81. |
| 5. | 1900 | Gouripur mill areas (24-Parganas) | -do- | a. as in Sl.4 b. H/M c. NA d. BPAAR, 1900 |
| 6. | 1900 | Kankinara Mill areas (24-Parganas) | Cow-killing during Bakr-Id | a. as in Sl.4 b. H/M c. NA d. BPAAR 1900 |
| B. 1905-1912 | | | | |
| 1-11 | 1906 April- May | Iswarganj & Nandail Police Station areas (Mymensingh) | "F a n a t i c a l disturbance (in different villages) by designing persons" led by Maulavi Samiruddin (a local preacher) and Dinesh Neogi (a recent convert to Islam). Attacks on Hindu houses and shops. | a. M b. M c. 22 cases registered and 49 persons sent up for trial. d. GOI Home (Pub.)/ June 1906/152-168, 169- 86; GOI Home(Pub.)/July 1906/124. |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|--------|------------------------|---|---|---|
| 12. | 1907 4 March | Comilla | Alleged disrespect to a procession of the Nawab of Dacca and retaliatory attacks on Hindus, looting of Hindu shops by Muslims. | a. M (app.200, of 'low class') b. M c. 1 Hindu chaukidar killed and several Hindus injured. Military Police called out. d. GOI Home(Pub.)A /May 1907/159-64. |
| 13. | 1907 March | Mogra Bazar (Agartala) | Swadeshi volunteers forcing shopkeepers to stop selling foreign goods and retaliatory attacks on Hindus and looting of Hindu shops. | a. HM b. M c. NA d. GOI Home(Pub.)A/ May 1907/165-70. |
| 14-24. | 1907 20-21 April | at different bathing ghats (Dacca and Faridpur) | Swadeshi volunteers forcing shopkeepers to stop selling foreign goods and retaliatory attacks on Hindus and looting of Hindu shops during Hindu bathing festival (Sankranti melas). | a. HM b. M c. NA d. GOI Home(Poll.) A/Dec. 1907/57-63 |
| 25. | 1907 21 April | Jamalpur,(Mymensingh) | as above, followed by large-scale attacks on Hindus, looting of Hindu shops, forcible entry into old Durgabari, destruction of deities and other properties. | a. HM b. M c. NA d. as above |
| 26. | 1907 28 April | Village Gugamanika, Jamalpur sub-divn. (Mymensingh) | looting of a Hindu shop & molestation of women. | a. M b. M c. No cognisable case registered. d. GOI Home(Poll.) A/Dec.1907/57-63, p.98 |
| 27. | | Village Melonda, Jamalpur (Mymensingh) | assault on 2 Hindus and threats of molestation of Hindu widows in neighbouring villages. | a. M b. M c. No cognisable case registered. d. <i>ibid.</i> |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|--------|-----------------------------|--|--|--|
| 28-34. | 1907 30 April | Village Kamarer-char, Jamalpur. (Mymensingh) | house of Gangaram, Gowri and Ram Chandra Madha were looted; 4 other houses also attacked and 'slightly damaged'. | a. M b. M c. 3 cases registered, 4 persons convicted & 3 discharged. d. Ibid. |
| 35. | 1907 2 May (10 pm) | Jorkhali (P.S. Madarganj), Jamalpur sub-division (Mymensingh) | attack on a Hindu house by Muslims wearing military uniform. | a. M b. M c. Final report True (FRT) d. <i>ibid.</i> , p.106 |
| 36-50. | 1907 3 May (Noon) | Villages Palashtala and Madhabpur (P.S. Sherpur/Jamalpur sub-divn.) (Mymensingh) | houses of many Hindus looted. | a. M b. M c. 15 rioters sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 51-52. | 1907 3 May (7pm) | Malamari (P.S. Sherpur/Jamalpur sub-divn.) (Mymensingh) | house of Gobinda Muchi looted and another house destroyed by fire. | a. M b. M c. FRT d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 53. | 1907 7 May (Noon) | Bhelua (as above) | house of Shew Ratan Nunia looted. | a. M b. M c. FRT d. <i>ibid</i> |
| 54-64. | 1907 1 May (night) | Bakshiganj (P.S. Dewanganj/Jamalpur sub-divn.) (Mymensingh) | Shops of Hindus in Bakshiganj bazar looted; attack on a Kalibari and breaking of idol. | a. M b. M c. FRT d. <i>ibid.</i> , pp.101, 107 |
| 65-90. | 1907 2 May (day time) | Bakshiganj (as above) | 26 shops and houses of Hindus looted and Hindu goddesses mutilated; broken idol of the Kalibari thrown outside. Shops of 12 Sahas completely gutted. | a. M b. M c. 22 rioters sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 91-93. | 1907 2 May (11 p.m.) | Kharma village (as above) | houses of Chika Ram and two other Jhalas looted by 50 Muslims. | a. M b. M c. 2 sentenced. d. <i>ibid.</i> |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|--------------|----------------------------|---|---|--|
| 94-101. | 1907 3 May (10 p.m.) | Janakipur (P.S.Dewanganj/ Jamalpur sub- divn.)(Mymensingh) | house of Hari Tambuli and others looted | a. M b. M c. 2 sentenced d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 102- 111. | (11 p.m.) | Sarmara (as above) | 10 Hindu houses looted by 80-90 Muslims | a. M b. M c. 7 convicted d. <i>ibid</i> |
| 112- 114. | 1907 4 May (mid-day) | Kharma (as above) | Houses of 3 Hindus looted by 25-30 Muslims. | a. M b. M c. 1 convicted d. <i>ibid</i> |
| 115. | 1907 4 May (night) | Bahadurabad (as above) | shop of Bepin Banerji looted | a. M b. M c. all 7 accused discharged. d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 116. | -do- | -do- | shop of Kalicharan Saha looted | a. M b. M c. 1 convicted d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 117- 131. | 5 May (8-11 p.m.) | Kalikapur (as above) | house of 16 Jugis looted | a. M b. M c. 6 sentenced d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 132- 140. | -do- (night) | Dewanganj (as above) | Hindu shops looted | a. M b. M c. 14 convicted d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 141- 150. | -do- | -do- | Hindu shops destroyed by fire | a. M b. M c. 2 committed to sessions d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 151- 152. | 1907 5 May (night) | Dewanganj Jamalpur sub-divn. (Mymen- singh) | murder of 2 Muslims 'by sharp weapons by unknown persons' | a. NA b. NA c. FRT d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 153- 160. | -do- | Patharshi (as above) | houses of 8 Goalas looted and idols mutilated. | a. M b. M c. 8 sentenced. d. <i>ibid.</i> ,p.108. |
| 161 | -do- | Kalikapur (as above) | house of Rup Das Nath looted and he was seriously injured with a chopper. | a. M b. M c. 5 convicted. d. <i>ibid.</i> |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|----------|--------------------|---|--|--|
| 162. | -do- | -do- | house of one Bairagi was looted by about 20 Muslims. | a. M b. M c. 2 convicted d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 163-165. | -do- | Dakatia (as above) | house of Chandra Mohan Majhi looted and those of his neighbours attacked | a. M b. M c. NA d. <i>ibid</i> |
| 166. | 6 May (4 a.m.) | Kharma (as above) | house of Haridas Shil looted by about 22 Muslims. | a. M b. M c. 5 convicted d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 167. | 7 May (noon) | Parar Char (as above) | house of Khedu Muchi looted, his wife 'dragged' and one hut destroyed by fire. | a. M b. M c. 9 convicted d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 168. | 7 May (11 p.m.) | Maijbari (as above) | Complainant's sister was forcibly taken away by Muslims. | a. M b. M c. 4 committed to sessions. d. <i>ibid.</i> , p. 109. |
| 169. | 7 May (night) | Patharsi (as above) | house of Akrur Kamar destroyed by fire. | a. M b. M c. FRT d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 170. | 8 May (1 A.M) | Goukura (as above) | house of Ishan Nama destroyed by fire. | a. M b. M c. FRT d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 171. | 10 May (night) | Patharsi (as above) | house of Rupchand Rajbanshi destroyed by fire. | a. M b. M c. FRT d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 172-80. | 8 May (3.30 pm) | Tarakanda Bazar (P.S.Fulpur/Sadar sub-divn.) (Mymensingh) | Hindu shops looted. | a. M b. M c. 36 convicted d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 181-190. | -do- | -do- | Muslim stalls looted by Hindus & Muslims. | a. H + M b. H + M c. FRT d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 191. | -do- (night) | Gaziapara (as above) | 'dacoity' in the house of Sibnath by 20-25 unknown Muslims. | a. M b. M c. FRT d. <i>ibid.</i> |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|----------|---------------------|--|--|---|
| 192-200. | 9 May (3-30 pm) | Dephalia Bazar (as above) | Hindu shops looted. | a. M b. M c. 27 charged. d. <i>ibid.</i> ,p.110. |
| 201-02. | 9 May (5 p.m.) | Gomgaon (as above) | house of Baikuntha and Ramchandra Jhala looted. | a. M b. M c. 7 committed to session. d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 203. | 9 May (mid-night) | Bhattapara (as above) | 'dacoity' in the house of Budh Ram Dhubi by Muslims. | a. M b. M c. FRT d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 204-09. | 10 May (10 am-noon) | Balia, Paiska and Charalpara villages (Mymensingh) | house of Gourikanta and Ramchandra Barua Sarma (Balia), Govinda Rajak (Paiska) and Rajkishore, Iswarchandra & Shyamkishore Rajak(Charalpara) looted. | a. M b. M c. 9 convicted d. <i>ibid.</i> ,p.111 |
| 210-16. | -do- (3 p.m.) | Shilpur (as above) | house of Gayanath, Nimai, Dipcharan, Ramtanu, Dinanath, Prasanna and Kashicharan Gope looted. | a. M b. M c. 1 convicted d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 217-18. | -do- | Kuripara (as above) | houses of Kamal Chandra Saha and Charan Saha looted. | a. M b. M c. FRT d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 219. | -do- (4 p.m.) | Nagarbera (as above) | house of Jamini Barua Sharma looted | a. M b. M c. 2 convicted d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 220. | 10 May (mid-night) | Suknait (as above) | house of Rajchandra Das looted. | a. M b. M c. 5 discharged d. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 221. | -do- (mid-night) | | house of Ramkumar Barua Sarma looted. | a. M b. M c. 4 discharged d. <i>ibid.</i> |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|---------|-------------------|--|--|---|
| 222-30. | May 1907 | Nalka, Salanga and Dhukuri hats (Pabna) | looting of Hindu shops and houses. | a. M b. M c. NA d. EBPAAR, 1907, pp. 31-32. |
| 231-40. | -do- | Villages around Kesorehat and Ekdala (Rajshahi) | -do- | -do- |
| 241. | 1908 (15 January) | Narayanpur, P.S. Keshabpur. (Jessore) | Cow-slaughter during Bakr-Id. | a. H(800) + M(1000) b. H/M c. 17 Muslims arrested, 15 released later by SP d. GOB Police Br.B. Progs. 279/Feb. 1908 |
| 242. | 1909 (3 January) | Titagarh (24-Parganas) | -do- | a. H+M (mostly mill hands & believed to be upcountrymen) b. r(M)/P. c. Troops called in when Muslim mill-hands from Serampore (across the river) tried to cross over to Titagarh; firing by Police & troops, resulting in death of 3 and injury to some; 150 arrested. d. GOI Home(Police) A/Feb. 1909/149-55. |
| 243-48. | 1910 (December) | Chitpur/Armenian St./Harrison Rd./College St. (Calcutta) | cow-slaughter during Bakr-Id resulting in looting of Hindu shops and houses | a. H(mainly Marwaris and upcountrymen) +M(Kabulis & other low class Muslims). b. H/M c. Army called out; 4 rioters killed & many injured, troops despatched to neighbouring mill/factory areas. d. GOI Home(Police) A/Feb. 1911/62-64. |
| 249-50. | 1911 18-20 May | Villages on Khulna-Jessore Border | Attack on a Namasudra villages by Muslims as a sequel to damage of crops by cattle and retaliatory attack by Namasudras. | a. M + H b. M/H c. No loss of life; Military Police called out. d. GOI Home(Poll.) B/July 1911/76-83. |

APPENDIX VII

Major (reported) incidents of unrest among industrial workers in Bengal (1862 - 1912)

| Sl. No. | Year/ period of occurrence | Establishment affected (district) | Issue | Remarks a. composition of workers involved b. nature of incident c. other information if any, including source etc. |
|------------|----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| 1. | 1862 | East Indian Railway (EIR)(Howrah) | NA | a. Workers at Howrah Rly.station and audit deptt.clerks b. strike c. N.A. |
| 2. | 1881 | Ghoosury/Bowreah Cotton Mill (CM) (Howrah) | against reduction of wages | a. N.A. b. strike (10 days) c. GOI Home(Judl.) Progs./Sept.1883/ 218 |
| 3. | 1886 | Some Cotton Mills (24-Parganas) | -do- (reduction "necessitated by the depressed state of the trade".) | a. N.A. b. strike c. Presidency Div. Commissioner's Annual Administ- ration Report, 1885- 86 in GOB Genl. Misc.Nos. 1-3, Nov. 1886 |
| 4. | 1890 | -do- | against reduction of wages | a. N.A. b. strike (3 days) c. GOI Home(Judl.) Progs.A/Sept.1892/ 280 |
| 5 | 1893 | Shibpur Jute Mill (JM)(Howrah) | demanding dismissal of an "objectionable sardar". | a. N.A. b. demonstration, strike c. Source: Pratt Report(WBSA: GOB Judl Police Progs/January 1896/6-11) |
| | 1894 | Shyamnagar JM (24-Parganas) | protesting against assult on a worker by a European staff | a. Spinners b. demonstration; strike Pratt Report |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|-----|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---|--|
| 7. | 1894 | Baranagar JM (24-Parganas) | demanding paid holiday for Bakr-Id | a. Muslim workers b. demonstration c. as above |
| 8. | 1894 | Kamarhati JM (24-Parganas) | -do- | a. as above b. as above; brick batting of the manager. c. as above |
| 9. | 1895 (Febr- uary) | Champdani JM (Hooghly) | demanding wage increase. | a. initiative by spinning dept. workers. b. strike (3 days) c. as above |
| 10. | 1895 | Kankinara JM (24-Parganas) | demanding paid holidays for observing religious festivals (on 3 different occasions for Bakr-Id, Muharram and Rathajatra respectively) | a. Muslim and Hindu workers (separately on 3 separate festive occasions) b. demonstration c. as above |
| 11. | 1895 | Gouripur JM (24-Parganas) | -do- | a. as above b. as above c. as above |
| 12. | 1895 | Dunbar CM (24-Parganas) | -do- | as above |
| 13. | 1895 | Ganges JM (Hooghly) | -do- (for Bakr-Id) | a. Muslim workers b. as above c. as above |
| 14. | 1895 (April) | Titagarh JM (24-Parganas) | -do- (for Annapurna puja) | a. Hindu workers b. demonstration assault on manager c. as above |
| 15. | 1895 | Titagarh JM (24-Parganas) | -do- (for Id-ul Fitr) | a. Muslim workers b. demonstration; picketing; riot; attack on mill premises; use of firearms by Europ- ean managers. c. Report on the working of Indian Factories Act (RIFA) for 1895; LJMA Report for 1895, pp.76-80 |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|-----|-----------------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| 16. | 1895 (April) | Titagarh JM (24-Parganas) | demanding pay which was stopped for absence on Bakr-Id day | a. Muslim workers whose pay was stopped b. demonstration; police called in who tried to arrest some leading demonstrators; rioting; use of firearms by managerial staff c. as above; Pratt Report |
| 17. | 1895 (June) | Kamarhati JM (24-Parganas) | as above (during Muharram festival) | a. Muslim workers whose pay was stopped. b. demonstration; the European staff armed themselves "to resist a possible outbreak" c. as above |
| 18. | 1895 | Kankinara JM (24-Parganas) | against reduction of wages of spinners | a. spinners b. demonstration; gherao; strike; attempt by management to "lockout ring leaders", riot; attempted attack on manager; police called in; arrests c. as above |
| 19. | 1895 (June) | Budge Budge JM (24-Parganas) | demanding removal of an 'unpopular' sardar | a. initially the spinners only but others joined later b. demonstration; lockout and withholding of pay of previous week; further demonstration and attack on quarters of European staff by throwing brick-bats; firing by European staff causing serious injury to 2 workers; police called in; arrests c. 21 Persons sent up for trial, 19 convicted; source as above |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|-----|-----------------------|---|---|--|
| 20. | 1896 (March-April) | Baranagore JM (24-Parganas) | demanding higher wages and against longer hours of work (due to introduction of electric light) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. initially workers of spinning section, later others joined b. demonstration; strike; gherao; rioting (assault of an Indian clerk and brickbatting of mill premises); police intervention, arrest c. RIFA, 1896; <i>The Englishman</i> dt. 1 and 8 April 1896 |
| 21. | 1896 (June) | Budge Budge JM (24-Parganas) | NA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. NA b. Strike (8 days) c. RIFA, 1896 |
| 22. | 1897 (June & July) | Many mills/factories in and around Calcutta including 24-Parganas | protest against action by police and troops on Muslim rioters over Tala mosque (Calcutta) issue, and wanting to proceed to Calcutta | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Muslims workers b. demonstration; stoppage of work c. Home(Pub.) Progs. Oct. 1897/124-57; BAAR, 1899-1900; GOB Judl. Police Progs/July 1897/39-43 and Sept. 1897/83-84 |
| 23. | 1897 July | Alliance JM, Jagatdal (24-Parganas) | demanding leave with pay on Id day | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Muslim workers b. demonstration; rioting; attack on factory c. GOB Judl. Police/Sept. 1897/83-84 |
| 24. | 1899 (November) | Bowreah CM, Ghosury (Howrah) | protest against reduction of wages on the plea of depression of trade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. initially the reelers but later joined by others b. deputation; go-slow movement; lockout; gherao of European managerial staff; exchange of blows, brickbatting by some workers; firing by some managers causing injury to several workers; strike c. Arrests; 16 workers sent up for trial & convicted. Source : Bengal Judl. (Police) Progs. Dec. 1899/22-29 & Jan. 1900/48-52; BAAR, 1899-1900 |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|-----|-------------------|---|--|--|
| 25. | 1900 | Budge Budge JM (24-Parganas) | NA | a. NA b. Strike c. BAAR, 1899-1900 |
| 26. | 1900 | Kamarhati JM (24-Parganas) | NA | a. NA b. riot c. as above |
| 27. | 1900 | Kankinara JM (24-Parganas) | NA | a. NA b. riot c. as above |
| 28. | 1905 (August) | Burn & Company (Howrah) | Against introduction of the mechanical system of recording attendance | a. clerks(app.300) b. walkout; strike c. Home (Pub.) Progs.June 1906/ 169-86; <i>Amrita Bazar Patrika</i> dt. 4 and 9 Sept.1905 and other newspaper reports cited in Sumit Sarkar, <i>Swadeshi Movement in Bengal</i> , pp.200-02 |
| 29. | 1905 (October) | Gouripur JM (24-Parganas) | Shooting 'accident' by an European assistant in which two workers were injured in place of a dog | a. NA b. demonstration; strike c. The European asstt. fined by a magist- rate and made to pay compensation to the injured: Sarkar,op.cit., pp.227-28. |
| 30. | 1905 (October) | Calcutta Tramways | d e m a n d i n g consolidated monthly wages in place of payments by trips, and end to unjust fines, reduction in working hours etc. | a. drivers and conductors b. as above c. as above,pp.202-03 |
| 31. | 1905 (October) | East Indian Rlys. (Burdwan) | protest against wage system | a. Guards (Europeans and Eurasians) b. Strike c. GOI Home (Pub.)/ June 1906/169-86 |
| 32. | 1905 (October) | Government printing presses (Calcutta) | against reduction in puja advance, harsh service conditions, ill-treatment by European officers, | a. Printing workers b. strike followed by lockout, dismissals etc. c. as above |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|-----|--------------------------|---|---|--|
| 33. | 1905 (October) | Lower Hooghly JM (24-Parganas) | against imposition of fines and assault by European overseers. | a. Spinners b. strike (2 days) c. as above |
| 34. | 1905 (October) | Fort Gloster JM, Bowraah (Howrah) | demand for increase in wages, against hours of work and undue objection of European managers to Bengali clerks and Muslim workers exchanging <i>rakhis</i> (threaded wristlets) in token of Hindu-Muslim unity. | a. mostly Bengali Hindus. b. shouting of Bande Mataram; strike (3 times during Oct. 1905-March 1906) c. as above |
| 35. | 1905 (Novem- ber) | Wellington JM (Hooghly) | against insufficient joining time after Ramzan fast. | a. Muslim workers b. strike c. as above |
| 36. | 1906 (July) | EIR (Bengal Section) | demanding higher wages, better uniforms, improved housing and also against racial discrimination in service conditions | a. NA b. strike c. as above; Sarkar, op.cit., pp.216-18 |
| 37. | 1906 (Septem- ber) | Kharagpur Rly. Workshop (Mid- napore) | demanding grain compensation allowance due to high prices of foodgrains | a. NA b. strike (3 days) c. Home (Pub.) Progs./Dec. 1906/ 70-75 |
| 38. | 1906 (April) | Factories in and around Calcutta | demanding higher wages | a. approximately 2000 porters, mostly Oriya. b. strike c. <i>Bengalee</i> dt 27 April 1906; Sarkar op. cit., p.205 |
| 39. | 1906 (July) | Printing presses (Calcutta) | -do- | a. NA b. strike c. Sarkar, op.cit., pp. 221-14 |
| 40. | 1906 (August) | Clive JM (24-Parganas) | demanding better working conditions and against humiliating treatment by British management | a. NA b. strike c. <i>ibid.</i> , p.230 |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|-----|--------------------------|--|---|--|
| 41. | -do- | Calcutta Corporation | demanding wage increase to meet rising food prices | a. app. 2000 workers b. NA c. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 42. | 1906 (Septem- ber) | Titagarh JM (24-Parganas) | NA | a. NA b. riot and strike c. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 43. | 1906 (Decem- ber) | Lower Hooghly JM, Garden Reach (24-Parganas) | against low wages and opposing night shifts | a. NA b. strike; lock-out (4 months) c. <i>ibid.</i> |
| 44. | 1907 (Novem- ber) | EIR (Asansol) (Burdwan) | Against long hours of work etc. | a. mainly European and Anglo-Indian railwaymen b. strike c. Armed Police and troops called and strike suppressed. Source: Home (Pub.) Progs. B/ Nov. 1907/254-68 |
| 45. | 1907 (Decem- ber) | Eastern Bengal State Railway | demanding higher wages and against racial discrimination in wage structure | a. (mostly Muslim) Indian drivers and firemen of goods trains b. strike, after taking 'vow on the Koran' c. <i>Administration of Bengal under Andrew Fraser (1903-08)</i> , pp.24- 30; Sarkar, op. cit., pp.226-27 |
| 46. | 1908 (Febru- ary) | Hooghly JM (24-Par- ganas) | demanding better working conditions. | a. child labourers (10-18 yrs.) who formed nearly half of 4 thousand workers b. demonstration; strike c. <i>Times of India</i> dt.8 Feb.1908. |
| 47. | 1908 (March) | Kankinara JM (24-Parganas) | NA | a. app.4000 workers b. demonstration; strike; attack on factory premises; firing by mill managers, injuring 3 workers; police called in; arrests. c. <i>Times of India</i> dt.14 March 1908 |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|-----------------|-------------------------|--|--|---|
| 48. | 1910 (Decem- ber) | mills/factories in and around Calcutta | protesting Govt. action against Muslim rioters in Calcutta on Bakr-Id day | a. Muslim workers b. demonstration; cease-work c. Home(Police)Progs. A/Feb 1911/62-64. For details see Ch. 7, Sec V |
| 49. to 57 | 1912 | 9 JMs, e.g. Clive, Howrah, Ganges, South Baranagore, Bally, Naihati, and three Anglo-Indian JMs (24-Parganas, Hooghly and Howrah) | protesting against longer hours of work, introduction of shift system and retren- chment of workers. | a. NA b. strike c. RIFA, 1912, para 10. |

APPENDIX VIII

Forms of protest action by industrial workers in Bengal:1861-1912

| Form of protest | Mills affected (year of occurrence) |
|--|---|
| I. Go-slow/Tool-down/Short duration cease- work not amounting to strike | 1- 6. Some mills/factories as a sequel to the Tala riots (1897) 7. Bowreah Cotton Mill (1899) 8. Burn & Co. (1905) 9-14. Some mills/factories as a sequel to the Chitpur Bakr-Id riots (1910) |
| II. (a) Demonstration | 1. Shibpur Jute Mill JM (1893) 2. Shamnagar JM (1894) 3. Baranagar JM (1894) 4. Kamarhati JM (1894) 5- 7. Kankinara JM (1895) 8-10. Gouripur JM (1895) 11 13. Dunbar JM (1895) 14. Ganges JM (1895) 15-17. Titagarh JM (1895) 18. Kamarhati JM (1895) 19. Kankinara JM (1895) 20. Bridge Bridge JM (1895) 21. Baranagar JM (1896) 22-27. Some mills/factories after the Tala riots (1897) 28. Gouripur JM (1905) 29 34. Some mills/factories after the Chitpur Bakr-Id riots (1910). |
| (b) Picketing | 1. Titagarh JM (1895) |
| III. Gherao (i.e. confining manager at a particular worksite or in office) | 1. Kankinara JM (1895) 2. Baranagar JM (1896) 3. Bowreah Cotton Mill (1899). |
| IV. Strike- | |
| (a) against reduction of wages | 1. Ghosury Cotton Mill (1881) 2. -do- (1890) 3. Kankinara JM (1895) 4. Bowreah Cotton Mill (1899). |
| (b) demanding higher wages | 1. Champdani JM (1895) 2. Baranagar JM (1896) 3. Fort Gloster JM (1905) 4. East Indian Railways (1906) 5. Kharagpur Rly. Workshop (1906) 6. Printing Press (1906) 7. Calcutta Corporation (1906) 8. Hooghly JM (1906) 9. Eastern Bengal State Rly. (1907) |

| Form of protest | Mills affected (year of occurrence) | |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| (c) demanding better working conditions (e.g. against night shifts, lengthening of working hours etc.) | 1. | Baranagar JM (1896) |
| | 2. | Burn & Co. (1905) |
| | 3. | Calcutta Tramways (1905) |
| | 4. | East Indian Rlys. (1905) |
| | 5. | Govt. Printing Press (1905) |
| | 6. | Wellington JM (1905) |
| | 7. | Clive JM (1906) |
| | 8. | Hooghly JM (1906) |
| | 9. | East Indian Rlys. (1907) |
| | 10-18. | Clive, Howrah, Ganges and six other JMs (1912). |
| (d) demanding better living conditions | 1. | East Indian Rlys. (1906) |
| (e) demanding removal of sardar | 1. | Shibpur JM (1893) |
| | 2. | Budge Budge JM (1895) |
| (f) against racial discrimination | 1. | East Indian Rlys. (1906) |
| | 2. | Eastern Bengal State Rlys. (1907) |
| (g) against misconduct/harsh treatment by managerial staff | 1. | Shyamnagar JM (1894) |
| | 2. | Gouripur JM (1905) |
| | 3. | Lower Hooghly JM (1905) |
| | 4. | Fort Gloster JM (1905) |
| | 5. | Clive JM (1906) |
| (h) against retrenchment of workers (resulting from change in shift system) | 1-9. | Clive, Howrah, Ganges and six other JMs (1912) |
| (i) Strike on issues not known | 1. | East Indian Rly. (1862) |
| | 2. | Budge Budge JM (1900) |
| | 3. | Kamarhati JM (1900) |
| | 4. | Kankinara JM (1900) |
| | 5. | Titagarh JM (1906) |
| v. Rioting - | | |
| (a) attack on factory premises | 1 | Titagarh JM (1895) |
| | 2. | Baranagar JM (1896) |
| | 3. | Alliance JM (1897) |
| | 4. | Bowreah Cotton Mill (1899). |
| (b) machine-wrecking | 1. | Alliance JM, Jagatdal (1897) |
| | 2. | Bowreah Cotton Mill (1899) |
| (c) attack on managers | 1. | Kamarhati JM (1894) |
| | 2. | Titagarh JM (1895) |
| | 3. | Budge Budge JM (1895) |
| | 4. | Baranagar JM (1896) |
| | 5. | Alliance JM (1897) |
| | 6. | Bowreah Cotton Mill (1899) |

Note : If during workers' unrest in an industrial unit, the protest actions took different forms (e.g. demonstration, followed by rioting and strike), the same unit has been shown under each form of protest action. The Titagarh Jute Mill incident of 1895 and the Bowreah Cotton Mill case of 1899 are illustrative of this point and have been discussed in sec. IV of Ch. 8.

Source : See Appendix VII.

APPENDIX IX

Incidents of political crime in Bengal : 1906-1912

| Year/ Month/ date | District & place of occurrence | Type of incident | Remarks |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| 1906 | | | |
| 1. August | Rangpur (Mohipur) | attempted dacoity | |
| 2. September | Dacca (Sekharnagar) | -do- | |
| 1907 | | | |
| 1. N.A. | Dacca (Netaiganj) | robbery (one man stabbed) | |
| 2. N.A. | Dacca (Arsulia) | projected dacoity | |
| 3. April 21 | Mymensingh (Jamalpur) | rioting (one man wounded) | various convictions for rioting. |
| 4. August | Bankura (Hasa Danga) | projected dacoity | |
| 5. October | French Chander-nagore | attempted wrecking of Lt. Governor's train | |
| 6. December | Midnapore (Narayan-garh) | -do- | |
| 7. December 23 | Faridpore (Goalundo) | attempted murder of B.C. Allen, D.M., Dacca. | |
| 1908 | | | |
| 1. April 3 | Howrah (Sibpur) | dacoity (Rs. 400/-) | |
| 2. April 11 | French Chander-nagore | attempted murder of Mayor of French Chandernagore (bomb explosion) | |
| 3. April 30 | Muzaffarpur (Bihar) | murder of Mrs. & Miss Kennedy by bomb explosion on a carriage (presuming that the occupant was Kingsford, formerly Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta). | one assailant shot himself dead at the time of arrest (Prafula Chaki) and the other (Khudiram Bose) was tried and hanged. |
| 4. May 2 | Calcutta (Maniktola) | recovery of arms, ammunition, explosives etc. from Maniktola Garden at Muraripukur Road (Alipore conspiracy case) | of the accused persons 4 were sentenced to transportation for life, 3 to 10 yrs, R.I., 7 to 7 yrs, R.I. and 3 to 5 yrs R.I. |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| 5. May 3 | Midnapore | M i d n a p o r e conspiracy case | |
| 6. May 15 | Calcutta (Grey Street) | Bomb explosion | |
| 7. June 2 | Dacca (Barrah) | Dacoity (Rs.25,837) with murder | 4 persons killed, several wounded; 1 dacoit also killed |
| 8. June 21 | 24-Parganas (Kankinara) | cocoanut bomb explosions aimed at Rly. carriages | |
| 9. August 12 | 24-Parganas (Shyamnagar) | -do- | |
| 10. August 14 | Dacca (Satirpara) | Boat theft | 3 accused convicted |
| 11. August 15 | Mymensingh (Bajit- pur) | Dacoity (Rs.1500/-) | 2 accused convicted |
| 12. September 1 | 24-Parganas (Alipur Jail) | Murder of Naren Gossain | 2 accused hanged |
| 13. September 16 | Hooghly (Bighati) | Dacoity | 4 accused convicted |
| 14. October 30 | Faridpur (Naria) | Dacoity with arson | |
| 15. November 7 | Calcutta (Overtoun Hall) | Attempted murder of Andrew Fraser, Lt. Governor of Bengal | Accused convicted to 10 yrs. R.I. |
| 16. November 24 | 24-Parganas (Agar- para) | Cocoanut bomb explosions at Rly. carriages | |
| 17. December 21 | 24-Parganas (Kharda) | -do- | |
| 18. November 9 | Calcutta (Serpentine Lane) | Murder of S I Nandalal Banerjee | |
| 19. November 14 | Dacca (Ramna) | Murder of Sukumar Chakraborty, an associate of Pulin Das of Dacca Anushilan Samiti | |
| 20. " | Howrah | Murder of Keshab De | |
| 21. " | Dacca (Ramna) | Murder of Annada Ghosh | |
| 22. November 24 | Nadia (Raita) | Dacoity (Rs.1915/-) | |
| 23. December 2 | Hooghly (Morehal) | Dacoity (Rs.130/-) | 1 accused convicted |
| 24. " | Bakarganj (Dehar- gati) | Dacoity (Rs.3000/-) | |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| 1909 | | | |
| 1. January 1 | Tippera (Comilla) | Theft of arms (3 rifles) from the store of Nawab of Dacca at Comilla | |
| 2. February 10 | Calcutta | Murder of Ashutosh Biswas (Public Prosecutor) | 1 accused hanged |
| 3. | 24-Parganas (Belghoria) | Cocoon-shell bomb explosions | |
| 4. February 27 | Hooghly (Mashupur) | Dacoity (Rs.500/-) | |
| 5. April 23 | 24-Parganas (Netra) | Dacoity (Rs.2400/-) | |
| 6. June 3 | Faridpur (Fateh-jangpur) | Murder of Priyanath Chatterjee (mistaken to be Gabesh, his brother, PW in a case) | |
| 7. August 16 | Khulna (Nangla) | Dacoity (Rs.1070/-) | 1 accused convicted |
| 8. | Jessore | Conspiracy case | 6 accused transported for 7 to 3 years |
| 9. September 24 | Khulna (Hogulhunja) | Dacoity (Rs.50/-) | |
| 10. October 11 | Dacca (Rajendrapur) | Train dacoity (Rs.23,000/-) | 1 accused sentenced to transportation for life |
| 11. October 16 | Faridpur (Dariapur) | Dacoity (Rs.2,600/-) | Dacoity by men armed with revolvers and daggers, wearing masks & carrying hammers and torches |
| 12. October 28 | Nadia (Haludbari, P.S. Daulatpur) | Dacoity (Rs.1,400/-) | 5 persons sentenced to 8 yrs. 1 to 7 yrs and 1 to 5 yrs R.I. |
| 13. November 10 | Dacca (Rajnagar, P.S. Manikganj) | Dacoity (Rs.27,827/-) and arson | |
| 14. November 11 | Tippera (Mohanpur, P.S. Matla) | Dacoity (Rs.16,400/-) and arson | 1 man was wounded |
| 15. December 27 | Jessore (Bikara, P.S. Nawapara) | Dacoity (Rs.814/-) | Dacoity by 8 or 9 youths armed with revolvers and daggers |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 1910 | | | |
| 1 February 7 | Khulna (Soleganti, P.S. Damuria) | Dacoity (Rs.200/-) | |
| 2 February 11 | Jessore (Daulgram, P.S. Abhaynagar) | Dacoity (Rs.6,175/-) | |
| 3 March 30 | Khulna (Nandanpur, P.S. Khulna) | Dacoity (Rs 6,500/-) | |
| 4 July 5 | Jessore (Mahisa, P.S. Mahamadpur) | Dacoity (Rs.2,204/-) | 1 youth sentenced to 6 yrs. 1 to 5 yrs and 3 to 3 yrs R.I. |

Note : "All these robberies (dacoities) took place in the Khulna-Jessore country lying between Calcutta and Dacca and were perpetrated by young men armed with pistols and daggers. Inquiries led to the discovery of a gang of educated youths who associated for the purpose of committing dacoities ... of whom 17 were committed for trial to the High Court in what was known as the Khulna gang case. They all pleaded guilty and were discharged without punishment on their own recognizances binding them to be of good behaviour. There is no reason to doubt that they had combined to commit these crimes under the influence of the revolutionary ideas then prevalent".
Sedition Committee Report 1918, para 46 p.33

| | | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 5 July 21 | Mymensingh (Goalpur, P.S. Kotwali) | Arms theft | |
| 6 September 5 | Dacca (Munshiganj) | Discovery of bombs | 1 man sentenced to ten years transportation |
| 7 September 30 | Dacca (Haldia Hat, P.S. Lohajang) | Dacoity (Rs.1,500/-) with murder | |
| 8 November 7 | Faridpur (Kalargaon, P.S. Bhederganj) | Dacoity (Rs.12,660/-) | |
| 9 November 30 | Shakarganj (Dadpur, P.S. Mahendiganj) | Dacoity (Rs 49,368/-) | |

Note : "the three last mentioned dacoities originated among the students and teachers at the Sonarang National School ... The loot was partly used for the defence of the accused in the Dacca conspiracy case"; *SCR*, 1918, para 48, p.34

1911

| | | | |
|--------------|------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 1 January 21 | Dacca (Sonarang) | Postal peon assault case | 6 men convicted, mostly students and teachers of Sonarang National School. |
|--------------|------------------|--------------------------|--|

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| 2. February 5 | Faridpur (Panditchar) | Dacoity (Rs.5,500/-) | |
| 3. February 20 | Dacca (Goadia, P.S. Lohajang) | Dacoity (Rs.7,457/-) | |
| 4. February 21 | Calcutta | Murder of Srish Chandra Chakraborty (Hd. Constable of Calcutta CID) | |
| 5. March 2 | Calcutta | Bomb throwing at Dalhousie Square into car of a European, mistaken to be Denham of CID | Accused was a boy of 16 yrs. |
| 6. March 31 | Mymensingh (Suakair, P.S. Madarganj) | Dacoity (Rs.1,200/-) | |
| 7. April 10 | Dacca (Rauthbhog) | Murder of Man Mohan De, a witness in the Dacca conspiracy case | |
| 8. April 22 | Bakarganj (Lak-shankati) | Dacoity (Rs.10,200/-) | |
| 9. April 30 | Mymensingh (Char-shasa) | Dacoity (Rs.2,150/-) | |
| 10. | Tippera (Barkanta) | Dacoity (Rs.260/-) | |
| 11. June 19 | Mymensingh (Mymensingh) | Murder of Rajkumar (S.I.) | |
| 12. July 11 | Dacca (Sonarang) | Murder of 3 who were assisting police in the case at Sl.No.1/1911 | |
| 13. July 27 | Mymensingh (Sarachar, P.S. Bajitpur) | Dacoity | 1 youth sentenced to 5 yrs. R.I. |
| 14. September 5 | Dacca (Singhair, P.S. Manikganj) | Dacoity (Rs.8,170/-) | |
| 15. October 3 | Mymensingh (Kaliachar, P.S. Bajitpur) | Dacoity (Rs.3,125/-) | |
| 16. November 6 | Rangpur (Baliagram) | Dacoity (Rs.1,218/-) | |
| 17. December 11 | Bakarganj (Barisal) | Murder of Man Mohan Ghosh, Inspector of Police. | |

| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|---|-----|
| 18. December 31 | Noakhali (Chaulpali) | Dacoity (Rs.1,977/-) | |
| 1912 | | | |
| 1. January 23 | Dacca (Baiguntewari) | Dacoity (Rs.3,470/-) | |
| 2. February 21 | Dacca (Ainapur, P.S. Gheor) | Dacoity (Rs.7,593/-) | |
| 3. April 17 | Bakarganj (Kushan-gal) | Dacoity | |
| 4. April 19 | Bakarganj (Kakuria, P.S. Mehendiganj) | Dacoity (Rs.60/-) | |
| 5. May 23 | Bakarganj (Birangal) | Dacoity (Rs.8,080/-) | |
| 6. June | Noakhali (Feni) | Murder of Sarada Chakraborti (a member of the Dacca Anushilan Samity) | |
| 7. July 11 | Dacca (Panam, P.S. Narayanganj) | Dacoity (Rs.20,000/-) | |
| 8. July 15 | Bakarganj (Pratabpur, P.S. Kotwali) | Dacoity (Rs.7,595/-) | |
| 9. September 24 | Dacca (Goalnagar) | Murder of Ratilal Roy, Head Constable | |
| 10. October 27 | Tippera (Comilla) | Preparations for dacoity | |
| 11. November 14 | Dacca (Nangalbandh, P.S. Narayanganj) | Dacoity (Rs.16,000/-) | |
| 12. November 18 | Dacca (Kola, P.S. Sinagar) | Dacoity (Rs.95/-) | |
| 13. November 28 | Dacca (Wari) | Arms case | |
| 14. December 13 | Midnapore (Midnapore) | Attempted murder of an informer by bomb. | |

Note : Serials 1, 2 and 12 of 1912 were the work of the Madanipur (Faridpur) gang who "appeared to have thought it safer to operate away from home, and all these outrages took place on the other side of the great Padma river in the Dacca district. The sums looted amounted to about Rs.11,000/-. Their methods were terroristic. Armed with firearms, masked and bearing torches, they advanced in a body on the houses selected, made a great uproar, threw down bombs and fired shots to keep off the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and finally lined up before departure to the sound of a bugle" :SCR, para 55, p.38.

Dacca Anushilan Samiti was suspected to be responsible for the incidents of 1912 at serials 3, 4, 5, 10, 13, 6, 9, 7, 11, -SCR, pp.37-38.

Sources : *Sedition Committee Report*, 1918 and other connected reports on the activities of the *Secret Samitis in Bengal* (IB, Library, Calcutta).

APPENDIX X

Vows administered to recruits in the secret political groups/samitis in Bengal (1906-1912)

I. Vows of the Jugantar/Chhatra Bhandar Group:

- 1) **Ami adya haite samprodai bhukto hoilam. Joto din na desh swadhin hoibe totodin e somprodai bhukto thakibo o desher karjya karibo.**
(I become a member of this society from today. So long as the country does not become independent, I shall continue to be a member of this society and shall serve the country)
- 2) **Ami kono durovisandhi loiya, ba kono kuabhipraye somprodai bhukto hoitech na.**
(It is not with any bad motive or any evil purpose that I am becoming a member of this society)
- 3) **Ami e somprodair protyek sabhyake brahtri bodhe dekhibo. Jodi kokhono kaharo sabit monobichhed hoi, taha hoile saral chitte metaibo.**
(Every member of this society will be a brother to me. If ever any alienation of feelings occurs between myself and any one, I shall remove it with an open heart)
- 4) **Ami netar bina adeshe kono karyya karibo na. Tini jaha adesh kariben taha alonghanio gyane o bina bakyabyaye palon karibo.**
(I shall not do any work without the leader's order. Whatsoever he will order I shall obey unhesitatingly, considering it to be untransgressable)
- 5) **Ami e somprodair kono goponiya bishoi janite chesta karibo na ebong jodi goponio bishoi karya modhya thakiya janite pari taha kahakeo emon ki kono sabhyakeo bolibo na.**
(I shall never try to become acquainted with the secrets of this society and, if in the course of any work I happen to become acquainted with any secret, I shall not divulge it to anybody, not even to any member)
- 6) **Jodi ami soichhae e somprodair kono ahitkar karyjya kori, ba netar adesh langhan kori, taha hoile netar adesh moto je keho sabhya amar prandando dite pariben, taha jonya bhogobaner nikot dayee haiben na.**
(If of my own will I do anythings harmful to the society or transgress the leader's order, then any member, under orders from the leader, will be competent to punish me with death, and for that he will not be accountable to God)

- 7) **Ami joto din ei somprodai bhukto thakibo, toto din bibaher dwara sansarer kariye byasta thakibo na.**
(So long as I continue to be a member of this society, I shall not involve myself in the affairs of the world by marriage)
- 8) **Ami sorboda dharme motee rakhiya satya pothe cholibo o brahmachariya paloner chesta karibo.**
(I shall always keep my mind steady in righteousness and walk the path of truth and shall try to live a life of celibacy)
- 9) **Ami tama, tulsi, Ganga jol, Gita, agni, talwar sporsha kariya o bhagabanke sakshya kariya ei brote broti hoilam.**
(I take this vow touching copper, tulsi (leaves of sacred plant of this name), Ganges water, Gita, fire and sword, and calling God to be witness)
- 10) **Ami jodi kokhono ei doshti protigya langhan kari taha hoile pitri purushganer narake gaman, matri hotya o matri raktopaner pape papi hoibo.**
(If ever I violate any of these ten vows, I shall be guilty of the sin of sending forefathers to hell, of matricide, and of drinking mother's blood)

II. Vows of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti :

The vows were four in number and of gradually increasing degrees of solemnity, marking the postulant's progressive initiation into the secrets of the Samiti. They were known as -

- 1) The Adya Pratijna, or initial vow
- 2) The Antya Pratijna, or final vow.
- 3) The Pratham Bisesh, or the first special vow.
- 4) The Dwitiya Bishesh, or the second special vow.

(1) The Adya Pratijna (Preliminary vow)

"Om Bande Mataram"

1. (a) I will never dissociate myself from this association.
(b) Wherever I may be, I will always make the utmost endeavour and effort to bring about the improvement of the association.
(c) I will never do anything that may injure the association.
(d) When I see any likelihood of injury to the association I will at once inform the authorities and do my best to remedy it.
2. (a) I will always keep my character pure and stainless.
(b) I will take particular care and make special effort to make body and mind firm and strong.

- (c) I will eschew fear as an abject passion.
- 3. (a) I will cherish no enmity towards any member of this association.
- (b) We members (literally, brethren) of the association will all of us be bound together by the tie of unity.
- (c) We will deliver one another from difficulties and dangers
- (d) And having an eye to one another's improvement, will gird up our loins for the well-being of the country and gradually of the world.
- 4. (a) If any member of the association offends me I will forgive him.
- (b) I will not cherish any feeling of hatred for anybody.
- (c) If anybody goes astray I will try to bring him round and act according to the orders of the manager to chasten and reform him.
- 5. (a) I will always obey the rules of the association.
- (b) I will obey without questioning the orders of the authorities.
- (c) I will never keep back anything from the manager and never tell him anything but what is the truth.
- (d) And will endeavour to be present in time for work.
- 6. (a) I will never neglect to learn exercise and drill as prescribed by the association.
- (b) I will never teach forms of exercise and arts of self-defence taught by the association without the permission of the association to anybody who is not a member of the association.
- (c) I will never learn anything anywhere in contravention of the rules and vows of the association."

(2) *The Antya Pratijna* (Final Vow).

"Om Bande Mataram"

- "1. I will not reveal to anybody any internal affairs of the association and will never, without cause, discuss those affairs.
- 2. I will never contravene the procedure of the association. I will always be obedient to the manager of the association. I will fully obey whatever order he makes at any time.
- 3. I will never change my residence without informing the manager. I will never keep back from the manager my place of residence or mode of living at any time. If I come to know of the existence of any conspiracy against the association I will at once inform the manager of it and set about remedying it according to his order.

4. Wherever and in whatever condition I may be at any time, I will at once come away on receiving the manager's order. If, on account of any serious physical or natural impediment I am unable to come, I will at once make a representation to the manager informing him of the circumstances and come away as soon as the impediment is overcome.
5. I will regard no work whatever as degrading. To do work of the association I will eschew hatred, shame and fear. I will wholly eschew the fear of public censure. I will not cherish even a little of desire of fame. I will not be envious of anybody because he excels me and attains fame. Regardless of either good or evil report and wholly eschewing argumentation and babbling, I will keep on performing my duties with gravity, patience and perseverance and will by no means hesitate to display self-abnegation, self-sacrifice and generosity in doing the work of the association.
6. Anything that I shall learn in this association by making a vow in respect thereof, I shall not be at liberty to teach anybody except sworn persons."

(3) *Pratham Bishes Pratijna* (First special vow)

"Om Bande Mataram"

"In the name of the (citing them as witnesses) the Parambrahma (God), father, mother, guru (religious preceptor), leader and the motherland, I am taking this oath that I shall not entangle myself in any affection either for my parents, agnates and relations, friends and home, etc., till the object of the Samiti is fulfilled.

"I shall not hesitate to make any sacrifice for the sake of the work of the Samiti. I shall never, for anything, leave this Samiti or the association thereof. I shall fully obey all the rules of this Samiti and this *mandali* (association). I shall perform without any objection all the works of this Samiti under the direction of, and in full subordination to, the permanent, temporary and the present leading members. I shall never change my residence without informing the leaders and shall never be anxious for my own selfish motives.

"I shall never, in my life, smoke or drink or take any intoxicating drug. I shall never have any sexual intercourse with a prostitute or any illicit connection with other's wife, widow or unmarried girls, or never masturbate or do anything unnatural with a boy, and I shall try my best to obstruct and remove the tendencies of my friends, relations and acquaintances towards these acts.

"I will bring everything to the knowledge of the authorities if anyone breaks this or any other vow for the taking of necessary steps against it, that if I flinch from this solemn vow or in any way act contrarily, the curse of God, of mother, and the mighty sages will destroy me ere long".

(4) *Dwitiya Bishesh Pratijna* (Second Special Vow)

"Om Bande Mataram"

1. In the presence of God, fire, mother, preceptor and the leader (lit, making them witnesses) I swear that I will do all the work of the circle (Samiti Bardhak Mandalī - circle for the development of good sense), staking my life and everything that I possess. I will carry out all commands and will act in opposition to those who act in opposition to the aforesaid circle and do injury to them to the utmost of my power. (The Samiti Bardhak Mandalī was described by Pulin Das as being the Executive Committee of the Samiti).
2. I swear that I will never discuss the inner secrets with anybody, and that I will not tell them to any relations and friends or unnecessarily ask anything about them even of those included in the circle.
3. I swear that I will always be ready to carry out commands in a steady and disinterested manner, always preserving the secrecy of "mantras" and discarding waywardness, fickleness and the propensities for loquacity and wrangling.
4. I swear that I will never conceal anything whatever from the leader, and that I will never tell him a lie.
5. I swear that I will always be engaged in the practice of religion, and that I will mete out just punishment to those who are antagonistic to it.
6. If I fall away from this vow or act in opposition to it, the curse of Brahmins, of the mother and of the great patriots of every country will destroy me ere long".

Note : These vows were administered in Bengali. The English (official) renderings provide the substance and in some cases, only these are available without the original Bengali versions.

Source : I. Vows of the Jugantar/Chhatra Bhandar Group: From the confessional statement dated 24.3.1910 of Lalit Mohan Chakraborty in Howrah conspiracy case made before a magistrate: quoted in Daly's *Note*, pp.30-31.

- II. Vows of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti: From documents seized by police in November, 1908 from the office of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti (*Bhuterbari*, Dacca) and reproduced in *An account of the revolutionary organization in Eastern Bengal with special reference to the Dacca Anushilan Samiti*, 1918, I.B. Library holding No.55, pp.30-32.

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|------|-------------------|
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INDEX

- Agrarian unrest, 2, 106
 Agricultural labourers; monthly wages, 122
 Allen (Mr.), 194
 "Amrita Bazar Patrika", 173
 "Ananda Math", 171
 Anti-partition agitation (1905), 5, 12, 120, 132, 167, 197, 198, 216
 Anushilan Samity, 172, 178, 185, 186, 191, 193, 194; *modus operandi*, 180-181
 Arnold, David; study of dacoity in Madras Presidency, 208-209
 Arya Samaj, 110, 123
 (The) Asiatic Society, 61
 Atmonnati Samiti, 172
 Bakarganj (district); high incidence of murder, 38, 39
 Bakshiganj-Dewanganj (Mymensingh); riots, 118-121
 Balasore (district); crime, 51, 55; dacoities, 55
 "Bande Mataram", slogan, 119, 161, 162, 175, 185, 192, 193
 "Bande Mataram", native newspaper, 173
 Banerjee, A.C. 163, 164, 191
 Banerjee, Rama Kant, 108
 Bankura (district); theft from granaries, 53
 Basu, Jnanendranath, 172
 Basu, Satyendranath, 172
 Benaras (Oudh); prevalence of female infanticide, 61
 Bengal; annual administration report, 41; anti-partition and swadeshi movement, 5, 12, 120, 132, 167, 197, 198; communal disorders, 214-215; composition of the industrial workforce, 142; crime : general trends and regional variations, 15-36; crime and criminals, 11, 212; crime history, 230; crime in non-industrialised districts, 48; crime per one lakh population, 30; crime scene : some special features, 37-54, 207; criminal administration, 66; criminal investigation department, 6, 75; criminals, 100; dacoity : annual averages, 42; Dacoity Commissioner, 213; Dakaiti Department, 42; dearth arising out of crop failure, 52; economic offences, 71, 73, 74, 76; exogenous criminal groups, 89-94; famine, 210; female education, 62-63; folklore and oral history, 103; geophysical features, 212; growth of communications

and industries, 44; growth rate of population, 141; immigrants into selected districts, 46; impact of anti-partition and swadesi movement on the industrial relation, 161; incidence of dacoity, 41; indigenous criminal groups, 85-89; industrial unrest, 138-140; industrial workforce, 2; inflow of immigrants, 44; instances of food scarcity, 50; intelligence branch, 6, 195; Islamization, 109-110; jail administration reports, 7, 39; kulinism, 63; labour unrest, 145-167; major issues of public disorder, 2; middle class, 62; murder : annual average cases, 39; partition, 192, 230; police annual administration reports, 7, 9, 15, 39; political violence, 176, 221; price of common rice, 18, 52, 148; religious communities, 107-110; revolutionary terrorism, 2; Secretariat Press Strike, 164; selected major crimes, 28-36, 48; sex ratio, 143; significant social changes, 5; social banditry, 103; socio-economic offences, 11; socio-economic scenario, 44-50; terrorists' social structure, 225; total cognisable crime, 16-34, 44; urban population, 141; volume of crime in the coal mining belt and industrial centre, 47; workers in textile and coal-mining units, 156;

workforce in jute, cotton and coal mining industries, 153
 (The) Bengal Chamber of Commerce, 174
 (The) Bengal Landholders Association, 174
 Bentinck, William (Lord), 59, 171
 "Bhadralok", 173, 221
 Bhattacharya, Nibaran, 172
 Bihar famine, 17
 Birbhum (district); dacoities, 52
 Bose, Premtosh, 164
 Brahmo Samaj, 186
 Bramley; enquiries regarding criminal gangs, 230
 (The) British Colonial Administration, 206
 Burdwan (district); affected by gangs of dacoits, 40; grain theft, 54; high concentration of migrant labour, 44; dacoities, 52; volume of crime in the coal mining belt, 47
 Burdwan (division); affected by famine, 17; impact of cognisable crime, 20, 24; properly crime, 30-31; property offences, 36
 Calcutta, 2; communal outrages, 112-118; police special branch, 195; riots, 220; Tramways, 164
 Carlyle circular, 192
 Charnick, Governor-General, 196
 Carnac, C.F. (Inspector General of Bengal Police); remark about the ways of recording crime, 10
 Case studies : Midnapore dist. crime vis-a-vis price of com-

- mon rice, 52-53; of some Bengal dacoits, 81-84; of three communal disorders, 113-17, 117-18, 118-21
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh, 219, 220
- "Charu Mibir", 70
- Chatterjee, Bankim Chandra, 164, 171, 173
- "Chhiattarer Mannantar", 210
- Child labour, 60
- "Chhotolok", 173
- Chitpur (Calcutta) riots, 1910; 117-118, 147, 220; participants, 124
- Chittagong Armoury Raid of 1930, 178
- Coalmine Workers; protest formats, 218; religion and caste composition, 158
- Collieries; labour settlements, 154-156
- Communal disorders and riots : meaning of communal in common usage, 107; new dimension from 1890s, 109-12; proximate causes, 111-112; reasons for increased frequency, 112; distinction between pre-1905 and post-1905 disorders, 124-25; participants, 114, 118, 121, 215; factors behind post-partition riots, 125-32, 215-16; Tala riots, Calcutta (1897), 113-17; Chitpur (Calcutta), Bakr-Id riots (1910), 117-18; Bakshiganj - Dewanganj (Mymensingh) riots (1907), 118-21; periodisation, 121-25
- Communal disturbances, 2; cause, 111-112
- Communal riots; participants, 215, 214-221
- Communal tension; Hindu-Muslim, 11, 214-221
- Convicts (Jail); occupations, 99; religion, 95-96, 97; sex, 95-96, 97
- Crime : definition of, 7; cognisable and non-cognisable, 8, 16; violent crimes and crimes against property, 29-36, 38-40, 206-07; relation to population, 21, 23, 26, 34; crime vis-a-vis police-population ratio, 26, 34; decadal variations in total cog. crime (TC), 21; selected major crimes, 27-29; inter-provincial crime trends, 25-26; crime records, statistics and data kept changing, 3, 5-7; crimes reported as accepted index, 8-10; crime and price level, 18-20, 51-55; scarcity and crime, 50-55, 218-12; short-term and long-term trends, 15-18, 29-36, 206-07; impact of anti-partition agitation, 20; new categories of crime created by legislation, 60-61, 72-73; analysis of jail data, 94-99; economic causes, 209-211; impact of industrialisation, 48
- Crime (political), 177, 187, 188, 221-226
- Crime (sexual), 68-70
- Criminals : case studies of some Bengal dacoits, 81-84; hierarchical structure, 83-84, 184; territoriality, 92; women

- criminals, 88-89, 95-96;
 juvenile offenders, 95, 97;
 socio-economic characteristics of Bengal convicts, 95-99, 101; criminal typology, 99-103, 212-14
 Criminals 84-94; coming down to Bengal, 43-44; habitation, 85-94; religion, 85-87; weapons, 87
 Criminal Law Amendment Act, 195
 Criminal Procedure Code, 194
 Criminal Tribes Act; 1871, 59, 99; 191, 102, 196
 Criminals Bengal, 80-103; caste, 100-101; leader, 102-103; religion, 101; rituals, 83
 Chittagong (division); cognisable crime, 25; crimes of violence, 29; property offences, 36
 Dacca; formation of the Muslim League, 216
 Dacca (division); anti-partition agitation, 20; burglary and theft cases, 21; crimes of violence, 29; explanation for the causes of crime, 34; grain theft, 54; impact of cognisable crime, 20; prevalence of river dacoity, 43
 Dacoity; 51 incidents of, 178; notorious gangs, 42; involvement of upcountry boatmen, 42, 43, 44
 Dacoity (political); 221-222; Dhuldia, 183-184; Faridpur, 182-183; Haldiahat, 184-185; leaders, 186; modus operandi, 1-80
 Das, Bina, 223
 Das, Pulin, 227
 Dasgupta, Parimal, 225
 Dasgupta, Ranajit, 219, 220
 Datta, Aswini Kumar, 185, 190
 Datta, Bhupendranath, 179, 189, 225
 Datta, Charu Chandra, 186
 Datta, Kalidas, 186
 Day, Lal Behari, 64
 "Debi Chowdhurani", 171
 Demographic imbalances, 141-145
 Dudu Miya; Ferazi leader, 108
 Eastern Bengal; communal incidents, 215-216
 Economic offences, 70-76, 206-212
 Emerson (Mr.); D.M. Rangpur, 193
 "(The) Englishman", 174
 E.I. Railway; strike, 162
 Engleken; Anglo-Indian drivers' leader, 163
 Famine, 55, 67-68, 210, 211
 Famine Tract, 50-51
 Female Infanticide, 11, 61, 62
 Ferazi movement, 216
 Ferazis dress, 108-109
 Fukazawa, H. 155
 Gangasagar; sacrifice of first-born child, 64
 Ganguli, Bipin Behari, 172
 Gatrell; study of crime, 207-208
 Ghosh, A.K. 164
 Ghosh, Aurobinda, 179, 225
 Ghosh, Barin, 186, 193, 225
 Ghosal, Sarala (known as Saraladevi), 171, 172, 175, 222

- "Gita/Chandi", 224
 "Govinda Samanta", 64
 Grain looting : scarcity induced, 53-55; in Midnapore dist., 53; in Bankura dist. 53; in 24-Parganas dist., 54; in Champaran dist. (Bihar), 55
 Greenough, Paul; study of the Bengal famine, 211
 Gresham's Law, 224
 Guha, Manaranjan, 186
 Hardinge (Lord), 197
 Harvey; analysis of famine in N.W. Provinces, 208
 Hastings Warren, 59
 Hidayatullah; Justice of the Indian Supreme Court, 107
 Hindu revivalism, 214
 Hooghly (district); affected by gangs of dacoits, 40; crime due to industrialisation, 47, 207; immigrants, 44
 Howrah (district); crime in industrial centres, 47; rise in T.C. per unit of population, 207
 Hunter, William, 68
 Ibbetson, Denzil, 205-206
 Ilbert bill, 171
 India; Constitution (First amendment Act of 1951), 106-107; criminal administration, 5; women guilty of infanticide, 63
 India (British); crime situation, 25; T.C.-population, T.C.-police and police-population ratio, 26
 Indian criminal gangs, 59
 Indian Jute Mills Association, 115, 146
 Indian Law Commission, 60
 Indian National Congress, 172
 Indian Penal Code, 3-7, 26, 59
 Industrialization; impact on the crime situation, 38; linkage with crime, 208; processes, 207
 Industrial workers' unrest : endemic pockets, 138; demographic imbalances, 141-43; institutional causes, 143-44; religion-based, 145-47; due to economic and other secular reasons, 147-50; Bowreah Cotton Mill (Howrah) unrest (1899), forms and manifestations, 150-53; behaviour patterns of coalminers vis-a-vis textile workers, 153-60, 218-19; impact of swadeshi movement, 160-64; administrative reactions, 166-67
 Infanticide, 63, 64, 65, 67-68; in affluent families, 65; absence of female infanticide in Bengal, 62; women and infanticide, 63-65; geographical distribution in LPB, 66, reasonable explanations, 65-66
 Jessore (district); affected by gangs of dacoits, 40; grain theft, 54; incidence of murder, 39
 "Jibansmriti", 171
 "Jugantar", 173, 179
 Jungal Mahal, 51, 88-89
 Jute industry; increase in looms and labour, 148

Jute mills; 114-115, 217, 218;
religion-based labour unrest
145-147

Jute Mill Workers; religious and
caste groups, 159

Kanpur; textile workers, 220

Kathju, Motilal (Pandit); observa-
tions, 61-62

Kennedy (Mrs. and Miss), 175,
192, 193

Khan, Himmat, 113

Kingsford, 192

Labourers; behaviour patterns,
12, 218; protest formats, 218;
unrest : economic and secular
issues, 147-156

Lahore Bomb Case, 197

"Lal Istehar", 128

Lyon; Chief Secretary of E. Ben-
gal and Assam, 192, 196

Macaulay, 171

Mackenzie, A. 74

(The) Mahomedan Association of
Bengal, 219

Majumdar, Charu, 224

Mallah, Deegumber; a river
dacoit, 42

Mallick, Nirode Chandra, 186

Mallick, Rajendra, 126

Mallick, Subodh, 186

Maniktala Garden; terrorist's den,
192, 193

Maulavi, Din Mohammed, 119

Maulavi Md. Hashim, 194

Maulavi Samimuddin, 127

Midnapore (district); affected by
gangs of dacoits, 40; crime,
54, 55, 208, 209, 210, 211,

212; high incidence of mur-
der, 39; increase of dacoity
and robbery, 51; link between
price trends and crime trends,
52, theft from granaries, 53

Migration and immigration :
volume, 46, 142; affecting
crime level, 47-50, 93, 212;
affecting communal situation,
122-23, 217; affecting in-
dustrial relations, 141-44

Millitant nationalism, 12

Minto (Governor-General), 196

Misri Babu (Uttarpara), 186

Mitter, P., 175, 186

Mohammedan Criminal Law, 60

Moitra, Manmatha Nath, 76

Modus operandi : of dacoits, 41,
43; of political dacoities,
180-84; of indigenous
criminal gangs, 86-89, 247-
52; of exogenous gangs, 89-
93, 252-61

Moore, W.B.; Infanticide
Commissioner, 61

M/s. Burn & Co. of Howrah, 164

Mukherjee, Bamapada, 75

Mukherjee, Jadunath, 175

Mukherjee, Radhakamal, 155

Mukherjee, Rajendranath, 186

Munshi, Akbar Ali, 126

Murder; analysis of, 38

Murshidabad (district); affected
by gangs of dacoits, 40

Muslim elites'; delegation to the
Viceroy in Simla, 216

Muslim fundamentalism, 2, 214

Muslim League, 216

Muslim revolutionary activities,
190-191

- Mymensing (district); incidence of murder, 39, 212
- Nadia (dacoits); guala gangs, 42
- Nadia (district); affected by gangs of dacoits, 40
- Nandi, Indra, 186, 227
- Nandi, Nibaran, 172
- Nathan (officiating Commissioner of Dacca division), 126, 127, 190, 194
- "Nawabsaheber Subichar", 128
- Naxalite movement, 223, 224, 225
- Nayar, Baldev; analysis of crime trends in India, 206
- Offence : socio-economic, 58-76
- crime and offence as synonymous, 7; offences against women more in east Bengal districts, 68-69; participants in such offences, 69-70; some white collar offences and offenders in Bengal, 75-76
- Okakura, 175
- Pabna; ryots, 228
- Pal, Bipin Chandra, 164, 198
- Pan-Islamism, 123
- Participants : in dacoities, 81-84; in swadeshi dacoities and political crimes, 171-72, 179, 185-92; in scarcity-related crimes, 51-55; in communal disorders, 114, 118-21, 215-16; socio-economic backgrounds, 82, 85, 223-34, 227, 247-61
- Police Act of 1861, 3, 9, 40
- Political agitation (1905), 228
- Political crimes and terrorism : temporal and regional patterns, 174, 178-79; intensity curves of political violence, 175-77, 211; criminal conspiracy and gang cases, 180; administrative responses, 192-99, 228-30; vows administered to recruits, 186, 288-92
- Pratt; report on the Titagarh Jute Mill disturbances, 217
- Prices (wholesale); India and Bengal, 20
- Prostitution, 67-68
- Rain gambling : new type of economic offence, 73-74.
- Rajshahi (division), 18; property crimes, 31
- Reddy, Nagi, 225
- Rice and Wheat; index number of prices, 148
- Riots, 113-116, 127-131, 147, 214-217; jute mills, 144; pre and post-partition, 11-12; role of fanatical preachers, 126-131
- Risley Model, 62
- River crimes : river dacoity, 40, 42-44; lack of administrative response, 43; newspaper criticism of govt. inaction, 43; survey of river crimes, 43; Bramley report, 43-44, 93.
- River dacoits, 83-84; worst affected areas, 44
- Roy, Ananda Mohan, 76

Roy, Barada Prasanna, 119
 Roy Chowdhury, Sushital, 225

Saha, Lakhi Kanta, 119

Salked's Report, 186

"Sandhya", 173, 196

"Sanjivani", 70

"Sardari system", 218

Sarkar, Balai, 119

Sarkar, Sumit, 223

Sati; abolition of, 62

Scarcity : impact on crime, 50-55, 209-12; affected areas and persons, 50-55, 88; desertion of children during, 68.

Scott, James, 211

Sedition Committee Report, 189, 222

Seditious leaflets; "Bartaman Rananiti", 173; "Raja ke", 173, 174; "Sonar Bangla", 173, 174

Seditious Meetings Act (1907), 194

Sen, A.K.; study of the Bengal famine, 210

Sen, Asit, 225

Sen, Nabin Chandra; remarks regarding river piracy, 43

Sengupta, Promode, 225

Shore, John (Sir), 61

"(The) Statesman", 163

Sutherland, Edwin H., 74

Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, 185, 190

"Swadeshi Dakati", 179, 185, 221

Swadeshi movements, 12, 120, 132, 197, 198, 216, 227

Tala (Calcutta) riots, 1897; 113-116, 131, 147, 220

Talukdar, Kalpana, 223

Tea Gardens; exploitation of labourers, 60

Ted Gurr; study of crime in four metropolitan cities, 206

Tegart, C.A. 196

Telengana; left extremist movement, 223

Terrorism; political, 170-199

Textile workers, 220

Thakur, Rabindranath, 171, 173, 191

Thakur, Sookmoyi, 108

24-Parganas (district); affected by gangs of dacoits, 40; distress due to non-availability and high prices of food grains, 209, 210; incidence of murder, 39; industrial workers, 142; volume of crime in the industrial centres, 47

U.N. Congress; prevention of crime and treatment of offenders, 206

Unrest; industrial workers', 137-167, 191, institutional causes, 143-144

Waddedar, Pritilata, 223

Widow remarriage, 62

Zakaria, Hazi, 115, 118, 219

Zamindars; paiks, 209